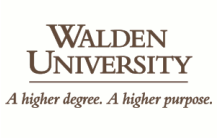

2019

Instructional Reading Practices for Third Grade African American Males

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Kimberly Whaley

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Instructional Reading Practices for Third Grade African American Males

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Kimberly D. Whaley

MEd, University of Texas at Tyler, 2012

MEd, Walden University, 2004

BS, Eastern New Mexico University, 1998

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

African American males often struggle to read on grade level. However, 3 East Texas Title I schools demonstrated exceptionally high levels of reading proficiency with this population. This study addressed the knowledge gap of understanding the instructional practices linked to high reading achievement of third grade African American males in Title I schools in East Texas. Guided by Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, which builds upon academic success, cultural competence, and development of critical consciousness, and supported by Vygotsky's theory of social and cognitive constructivism, the reading instructional practices of the 3 schools were investigated. Research questions focused on the instructional strategies and practices used by the Grade 3 teachers that may explain such high reading achievement in these particular schools. The questions also addressed campus-level administrator supports for guiding effective reading instruction. Through an explanatory case study methodology, the high levels of reading achievement seen in this population were explained. Data were collected from classroom teachers and campus administrators through semistructured interviews, personal reflections, and observations. Through use of *a priori* codes, open coding with thematic analysis, and axial coding, the key results aligned with the conceptual framework and indicated that the application of culturally relevant pedagogy explains much of the success experienced in the schools. Three themes resonated through the study: relationships, collaboration, and high expectations. This study contributes to positive social change by engendering a deeper understanding of effective instructional reading practices for African American males.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, children, and family (including those without a blood connection—you know who you are). Without your support, I would not be where I am at this point. Donald, I appreciate your understanding that we had to forgo some of our trips and outings so I could spend time with my computer and a multitude of articles and data. I know this has not been an easy journey, but I also know that I would never have made it without your strong support and encouragement. Thank you for always making certain I attain my dreams. Darrell and Lauren, your thoughts, ideas, and formatting expertise saved me more than one time. Thank you both for always cheering me on and believing in me. To all of my family, thank you for always being there to listen to my woes and victories throughout this journey. Without all of your prayers, love, and support, I know this would have never happened. You all are the reason I thrive and survive. I love each of you bunches and bunches.

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First, I must acknowledge my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Without him, I would never have been able to accomplish this huge task. In my wildest dreams, I never imagined that writing a dissertation and completing a doctoral degree would be so arduous. However, I have lived to tell the tale, and for that, I am very grateful.

A huge thank you to my chair, Dr. Steve Wells, for your undying support and willingness to field my questions and understand when I bombarded your email account with numerous emails, over and over. Your guidance and perseverance allowed me to successfully complete this study. Thank you for keeping me focused and on track as my chair and my methodologist. Dr. Nancy Williams, thank you for accepting the role of my 2nd committee member. I am so thankful for your positivity and providing the literacy view that was needed to help me create a balanced study that would provide educators with tools to meet the needs of children. Dr. Sam Lyman, thank you for your expertise. Your keen eye and input were a needed view to make certain all the parts were in place, and the study was prepared for defense. Each of you have been a true blessing from God. I couldn't have asked for a better committee to travel this path with me.

For all my close friends and family, you know how much you mean to me. You are steadfast and true. Your support, kindness, prayers, and love have made this so much easier. I could not have accomplished any of this without you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Most third grade Title I African American males in the United States require some form of intervention to succeed in the reading classroom (V. Williams, 2015). Inquiry into best instructional practices remains an important avenue for researchers seeking to generate pedagogical knowledge to support reading education (Dumas, 2017; J. Williams & Portman, 2014). Such investigations provide insight into best reading practices (Snow & Matthews, 2016). In this study, I investigated schools that have successfully taught African American males to read at or above grade level as measured by standardized exams.

The findings produced through this study can benefit teachers and students academically. Professional development can be guided by the findings of the research focused on improvement of instructional practices, increasing teacher knowledge of effective instructional strategies. The culmination of these actions can then lead to enhanced learning opportunities for the population in the area of reading, potentially providing insight that could lead to a higher level of learning for students. In response to the higher level of learning, a potential side effect could be lower stress levels in the home due to lower frustration levels on the part of the student and parents. With a newfound level of learning, the lifelong opportunities for these students could increase due to the students' academic success (Kirsch & Lennon, 2017).

In the remainder of this chapter, I present an overview of the study. A review of the research literature, including the gap in practice and the formal problem statement, is presented based on current, relevant, significant, and meaningful research supported by

literature. The purpose of the study is aligned closely to the research problem and is presented. The study's research questions and conceptual framework are also described in this chapter, along with support for the interrelated alignment of the study's components. I continue the chapter with an explanation of the study's rationale and summarization of the methodology along with definitions of terms and the study's assumptions. The scope and limitations, along with the study's significance, are presented in a manner that allows the reader to have a clear understanding of the overall purpose and process of the research.

Background

The scope of this study is third grade African American male reading students in three Title I elementary schools in East Texas. Several studies provided data to show that African American males are failing in the area of reading without intervention (Davis, 2016; J. Williams & Portman, 2014; V. Williams, 2015). From low expectations (E. Williams, 2015), evidence of intergroup bias (Bigler & Wright, 2014), effects of stereotyping African American students (Wasserberg, 2014), and inadequate cultural understanding of this population (Kelly, 2013), researchers have shown a current need for further study of effective instructional practices for at-risk African American males in the area of reading.

According to Newman-Brown (2016), there is a need for all teachers to acquire research-based strategies to effectively teach reading to third grade African American students. She stressed the influence of strategies used with English Language Learners (Newman-Brown, 2016). Davis (2016) explained that it is necessary to choose correct

materials and pedagogical approaches for diverse populations. Although many teachers have implemented teaching strategies for diverse learners, there could be mitigating factors that have interfered with the transfer of this knowledge (Durden, Escalante, & Blitch, 2015). Ferguson (2015) built on this idea, stressing the need for choice and engagement for elementary students. Instruction should be highly engaging with opportunity for choice (Ferguson, 2015). This study provides information to address the previously mentioned concerns. Instructional strategies, with potential to meet the needs of third grade African American males in reading instruction, were outlined in this information.

There are differing views of African American males in educational and home settings. Rowley et al. (2016) noted that expectations are not set as high for African American males at home or school in comparison to other ethnicities. They also found this to be true when African American males were compared to African American females (Rowley et al., 2016). Due to assumptions and general opinion, teachers often expect African American males to misbehave and underachieve academically (Rowley et al., 2016). There is also a disproportionate level of representation of African American males in discipline referrals (Wright & Ford, 2016). This is seen at all ages in all settings (Wright & Ford, 2016). Kurtz-Costes, Swinton, and Skinner (2014) presented research that showed teachers have lower expectations for African American students, leading to a higher level of teacher distrust by these students. Therefore, it is important for teachers, and those in the education field, to implement a path to instruction that will support a culturally relevant pedagogical approach providing support to this population of students.

Individual needs should dictate the instructional approach teachers take to instruct their students (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Paris and Alim (2014) and Kelly (2013) found that students' cultures should be supported linguistically, literacy-wise, and pedagogically. Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy holds that a culturally relevant approach is necessary for academic success, cultural competence, and development of critical consciousness for both students and educators (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). Therefore, students' needs should guide instruction through culturally significant approaches appropriate to attain the level of success each student deserves.

The Gap in Knowledge About Practice

The research problem represents a gap in knowledge about practice. This gap is the distance between current practice and understanding how to implement more effective reading strategies. Davis (2016) clearly outlined a need for more research concerning effective strategies for teaching African American males. Tatum and Muhammed (2012) focused on developing reading skills in African American males and decried the need for more research on instructional practices related to teaching reading to the study population. Thompson and Shamberger (2015) followed suit and stated that more research of strong pedagogical approaches should be completed to support reading skills of African American students. Tomkinson (2016) stated the need for more data collection from teacher perspectives to improve reading instruction for African American males. Finally, J. Williams and Portman (2014) voiced the need to investigate ways to support academic achievement of African American males who are at risk for failure.

Thus, this current study addressed a gap in research related to best instructional reading practices for at-risk African American males.

Problem Statement

The research problem this study addressed was insufficient understanding of instructional practices linked to high reading achievement of third grade African American males in Title I schools in East Texas. A synthesis of research literature revealed that this is a current and meaningful problem in the educational discipline. J. Williams and Portman (2014) reported a need to learn more about instructional strategies that support the academic achievement of at-risk African American males. Rowley et al. (2016) also stressed the necessity of further research to develop effective instructional methods to meet the needs of African American males. Tomkinson (2016) urged additional research to include teacher perspectives of effective reading instruction for African American males. She observed that many administrators, but few teachers, have been queried about best instructional practices for reading with this population (Tomkinson, 2016). Finally, Newman-Brown (2016) encouraged research specifically into educators' perceptions of instruction that will increase reading proficiency. This study constituted a next logical step in the inquiry called for in the aforementioned studies.

Purpose of the Study

The Texas Education Agency (2017) confirmed low reading scores among African Americans in East Texas when they published state assessment reading scores for the third grade. Three Title I elementary schools in East Texas exceeded the reading

achievement norms for third grade African American males (Texas Education Agency, 2017). The purpose of this explanatory case study was to investigate the instructional practices at these three East Texas Title I schools pertaining to effective reading instruction for third grade African American males. Through this study, I sought explanations as to how the phenomenon of interest, the instructional practices in these successful schools, is linked to the high levels of reading achievement present (see Gray, 2017). The study provided a precise description of the case facts, consideration of alternate causes, and an evidence-based conclusion (see Yin, 2013b). The inquiry was framed by Vygotsky's (2004) theory of social and cognitive constructivism and Ladson-Billings's (1995a) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, described in greater detail below.

A synthesis of research (Newman-Brown, 2016; Rowley et al., 2016; Tomkinson, 2016; E. Williams, 2015; J. Williams & Portman, 2014, V. Williams, 2015) indicated a need for an increased understanding of effective instructional practices for the focus population. More specifically, a focus on strategies that support positive academic experiences for African American males was needed (Rowley et al., 2016). According to Newman-Brown (2016), studies related to academic success have been limited. Rowley et al. (2016) asserted that there have not been specific instructional strategies presented through research for this population. In this study, I investigated the phenomenon of reading instruction for third grade African American males attending Title I schools in East Texas through a qualitative explanatory case study. The purpose of the current study is important because studies have been limited on this aspect of academic success.

Research Questions

Research Question (RQ) #1: What strategies and/or methods are third grade instructional staff using to present reading instruction to third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

RQ #2: What supports do campus level administrators and teachers report are being used to guide effective reading instruction for third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

RQ #3: How are instructional practices, in the research schools, perceived to explain, or not explain, the high levels of reading achievement of third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

Conceptual Framework

Insufficient understanding of instructional practices for third grade African American males in Title I schools in East Texas is a problem that may be understood and refined through the lens of a culturally relevant conceptual framework. This dissertation's conceptual framework was based upon Ladson-Billings's (2014) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy and supported by Vygotsky's (2004) theory of social and cognitive constructivism. Vygotsky noted that individuals construct their own knowledge based on their own experiences. Through the integration of social and cognitive constructivism, students are more likely to learn at a level that leads to mastery (Au, 1998). Furthermore, Au (1998) explained that many diverse populations do not learn at appropriate levels because these students are not provided an outlet to express themselves nor interact in a manner that is natural to them.

Culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) is a constructivist theory that has been implemented in education (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). It is based on the three constructs of academic success, cultural competence, and development of critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). Aronson and Laughter (2016) explained that academic success refers to mastery of the skills presented—what a student can do as a result of the teaching received. They continued to explain that cultural competence is demonstrated by educators when they give recognition of the students' culture. Finally, the duo shared that critical consciousness refers to teacher understanding of social challenges endured by students within their culture, including race, gender, or class. According to the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers should understand these aspects of students' lives prior to initiating instruction. A more thorough explanation of the logical connections between the key elements of the study's conceptual framework is presented in Chapter 2.

Making conceptual distinctions and organizing ideas through the lens of Ladson-Billings's theory established the problem and purpose of this study. The phenomenon, instructional practices, is understood, in part, according to its conformity to the constructs of culturally relevant pedagogy. The research questions and data analysis were informed by Ladson-Billings's theory (1995a). Through use of the research questions and data analysis, I determined how participants incorporated academic success, cultural competence, and development of critical consciousness as part of their effective reading instructional practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995b, p. 160).

In this study, I used the constructs of academic success, cultural competence, and the development of critical consciousness (see Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160) to guide development of all key components of the study. This included the research questions, data collection, and data analysis. The conceptual framework informed the development of the interview protocol and the classroom observation instrument. The analysis determined, in part, the degree to which culturally relevant practices were linked to high levels of reading achievement present in these successful schools.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative. The methodology used in this dissertation was an explanatory case study. The case study is a powerful tool to study a specific area related to a need shown by a certain population (Jenkins, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The explanatory case study was an apt approach to explore the how and why of effective reading instructional practices for third grade African American males attending Title I schools in East Texas (see Gray, 2017). An explanatory case study is inductive in nature and investigates presumed causal relationships (Baškarada, 2014; Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2013a). I chose this approach for the following reasons. First, an explanatory case study seeks to explain the phenomenon through exploration from a real-life perspective (Yin, 2013a). In the same way, I sought an explanation for a linkage between the phenomenon and the outcomes present in these successful schools. Had this been a situation where outcomes were indeterminate, an exploratory case study may have been more appropriate (see Butin, 2010). However, because there were clear outcomes, this study merited an explanatory case study. Second, I focused on the how and why of

the phenomenon of reading instruction for this population (see Yin, 2013a). Taylor and Thomas-Gregory (2015) noted case study is well-suited for a how and why inquiry when the researcher does not have much, if any, jurisdiction over the circumstances. Through this case study, I will specifically explain how instruction was transmitted and the purpose of the approach in the three Title I elementary schools. This is a characteristic of case study. Finally, Baškarada (2014) noted that the importance of explanatory case studies relates to their influence concerning presumed causal relationships and convincing explanations for specific phenomena. In this study, there was a clear outcome in the case that, presumably, can be explained by the phenomenon of study, namely, the instructional practices.

What follows is a brief description of the setting for this study. The case was bounded by three Title I elementary schools located in East Texas that were chosen due to the high reading performance of their male African American students. The student populations of these urban, Title I schools reflected at least 70% low socioeconomic status (SES) enrollment (Texas Health and Human Services, 2015). The schools had the highest state reading assessment scores for third grade African American students attending comparable campuses in the East Texas area. Each campus had more than 500 students, with approximately 100 students in the third grade. The three schools were similar to the majority of schools in the area based on enrollment number and demographics. None of the three campuses were magnet or charter schools (Texas Education Agency, 2017).

On each campus, I interviewed the three individuals who were most knowledgeable in this instructional discipline. Participants included at least one administrator and two third grade reading teachers in each school. This equated to approximately nine interviews. I confirmed that each of the three schools had these positions and that all roles were played by different individuals. Data were evaluated using *a priori* coding, open coding with thematic analysis, and axial coding (see Saldaña, 2016).

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), triangulation can increase the trustworthiness of the study. I conducted semistructured interviews with campus practitioners and administrators. I also completed classroom observations in two third grade reading classes on each campus. I collected qualitative observational data implementing scripted notes and field notes based on Ladson-Billings's (1995b) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. The field notes from the observations included the opportunity to annotate if the teacher applied the theory's constructs, and, if so, the manner the constructs were apportioned. I identified the *a priori* codes related to the conceptual framework and used open coding followed by axial coding to identify common, powerful themes across all sources. Therefore, triangulation was possible through multiple sources of data, including the use of individual interviews, observations, and teacher personal reflections.

My working hypothesis supposed that the positive reading outcomes were linked, in a complex manner, to the phenomenon of instructional strategies. In this explanatory case study, I sought to uncover the linkage between the instructional practices and higher

than average reading achievement among third grade African American males in Title I schools. This provided the opportunity for additional strategies for teacher use as instructional approaches were adjusted for this group of students.

Definitions

The following is a list of terms used throughout the dissertation. The provided definition is in context to its use within the study.

Academic success: For the purposes of this study, academic success is the mastery of academic skills such as those in the core areas of reading and math, at a level that supports students as they move forward in their educational studies (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

Critical consciousness: For the purposes of this study, critical consciousness is the understanding of social issues students undergo within their culture. Critically conscious educators must first understand the pressure of the social issues on themselves and their students before integrating these into curriculum in order to make significant connections (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). According to Ladson-Billings (1995b), it is through the development of critical consciousness that teachers are able to build strong relationships with their students while building a robust learning community.

Cultural competence: For the purposes of this study, cultural competence is appropriately recognizing a student's culture. Critically competent educators would be those who help students recognize and celebrate their own culture in a manner that allows

the students to determine a viable path to reach the outcomes they desire (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

Assumptions

Some assumptions are necessary in scholarly research, and the assumptions for this study were as follows. I assumed that teachers of third grade African American males in a Title I school want to design opportunities that lead to successful learning outcomes. I also assumed that the teachers wish to generously provide students with care and academic achievement. With these assumptions, I investigated instructional strategies on the three elementary campuses.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I evaluated instructional strategies in reading that were presumed to connect to reading success for third grade African American males enrolled in Title I schools in East Texas. Three successful schools in East Texas, based on third grade state assessment reading scores, were studied and analyzed to determine the instructional strategies implemented on the campus that led to successful reading scores for this population. Although it would be insightful to study all Title I campuses with a successful reading record for this population, it was prohibitive due to manpower resources. Instead, the top three campuses in the region were chosen to gain insight into the instructional strategies used successfully for these students.

African American females, as well as students in other grade levels, were not considered in this study because third grade African American males are at a more elevated risk of reading failure than these demographics (V. Williams, 2015). Data from

campus faculty, specifically third grade reading teachers and their campus administrators from the three high achieving Title I campuses in East Texas, were collected because researchers had noted that there was a lack of input from campus personnel concerning strong instructional practices for these students (see Tomkinson, 2016). This led to a delimitation that excluded others' input into the research of this study.

This study yields transferable information for other Title I schools in the East Texas region servicing African American males in third grade. Although the study's outcome is not generalizable in nature, the relevancy of the case may be transferable to other cases. As Stuart, Bradshaw, and Leaf (2015) noted, to be generalizable, a study's information must be broader in nature. There are those who find qualitative research to be lacking due to its lack of generalizability. However, qualitative studies have a place in the research community and must meet specific criteria to be considered trustworthy (Cope, 2014). According to Cope (2014), the four necessary criteria for trustworthy qualitative research include "credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability" (p. 89). In this study, I focused on the East Texas region of the United States, and although there may be some relevancy to other areas of the United States, based on the narrowness of the study, it was not possible to make such an assumption. Generally, qualitative research is meant to study a specific phenomenon within a certain subset, and generalizability is not expected. Therefore, transferability within qualitative studies is thought to be a point of evaluation for this methodology (Leung, 2015). Transparency is imperative for true transferability to take place. Without this attribute, the information cannot be used in other settings (Korber, 2014). Transferability is considered met if those not connected

with the study can use the information in their own setting (Cope, 2014). Such was the case for this body of research.

To answer the associated research questions, a qualitative explanatory case study based on Ladson-Billings's (1995a) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy was implemented to determine if the educators on these campuses apply this theory in their instructional practices. Through this conceptual framework, supported by Vygotsky's (2004) theory of social and cognitive constructivism, I determined successful instructional approaches and pedagogical theories that affected the success of these students in the area of reading. It is believed that a focus on academic success, critical consciousness, and cultural competence through the instructional practices of those teachers working with the target population will lead to success in reading (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

Ladson-Billings's (1995a) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy was the binding framework for this study. Other frameworks were not used although they may have been used prior when studying strong instructional practices for teaching African American students in the area of reading. Bandura's (1993) theory of self-efficacy focuses on students' personal beliefs concerning their capability to learn and motivation and was considered for this study. The emphasis of Bandura's theory focuses on the individual's view of their personal abilities. Furthermore, Bandura (1977) explained the impact of self-efficacy on success in many settings based on prior experiences, explaining how this transfers to learning. However, in this study, I focused on the cultural aspect of

instructional practices for the target population. The scope of the study addressed these concepts alone.

Limitations

There were a few limitations associated with this study. Due to normal attrition rates, some teachers who taught at the research schools recently were no longer employed there. I relied on current campus personnel to provide insight into the instructional strategies that were used during the successful assessment of the target population. Should a teacher have chosen not to participate in the data collection process, I contacted others on the campus who had a connection with the student instructional process for input.

I attentively approached this research with the intent to avoid biases. Due to my close relationship with the target population during my time teaching and serving as a campus administrator, I cautiously approached the research in a manner that avoided my ideas and thoughts concerning successful instructional strategies used to teach the target population to read appropriately. I concentrated on the research questions and strictly followed the data collection procedures outlined in the research plan to avoid any biases that could influence the outcome of the study. I had no professional relationship with any of the school districts in this study. I worked in one of the districts for 4 years several years ago as a classroom teacher and instructional coach. I, however, never worked on the campus addressed in the study.

Significance

This research is significant because it increases understanding of effective instructional methods for third grade African American males in successful Title I schools in East Texas focused on campus instructional staff input (see Tomkinson, 2016). Including educators' personal views concerning instructional practices used when teaching reading to this at-risk population may lead to an increase in reading proficiency for these students (see Newman-Brown, 2016). The findings demonstrate effective instructional practices that high-performing schools use, providing information concerning the instructional strategies and approaches to educational leaders of lower performing schools. The findings from the study include practices perceived to improve reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension skills among the population. Increased acumen of effective reading instruction supports teachers, administrators, and district directors as they plan and create approaches to meet these students' academic needs (Newman-Brown, 2016).

The findings of this study can contribute to positive social change for students, parents, and teachers. Increased understanding of effective instructional practices improves opportunities for the students to increase their reading proficiency. The study's findings can be extended into professional development that can support teachers' instructional approaches. Through improvement of instructional practices in reading, students may achieve at a higher level, leading to more success in other academic areas. In turn, parents may benefit with lower levels of stress connected to school and positive

long-term educational outcomes for their children that may lead to further successful lifelong opportunities.

Summary

At-risk, third grade African American males require more support in the area of reading in order to succeed (V. Williams, 2015). Therefore, it is vital to determine effective instructional strategies in this area for this population (Snow & Matthews, 2016). This success was noted at three elementary campuses in East Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2017) where this population learned to read at or above grade level based on standardized state examinations. The information revealed through this study supports teachers and students, leading to a potentially higher level of learning success for these students.

Through an overview of the qualitative explanatory case study, an outline of the study's steps was presented. A presentation of the study's background provided understanding of the need for study. In this chapter, I also presented the problem and purpose to explain the focus of the study, followed by the specific research questions that guided the investigation. In addition, I outlined the conceptual framework, expressing the theory upon which the study was built. All parts of the study were grounded in Ladson-Billings's (2014) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy and supported by Vygotsky's (2004) theory of social and cognitive constructivism. An outline of the assumptions and limitations of the study were included to provide a clear understanding of what the study included. Finally, the significance and potential positive social change of the study was outlined.

Chapter 2 moves the study forward, providing significant information on research literature that supported the need for this study. I provide an explanation of the strategies used to find the literature concerning this topic. The researched information addresses the study's conceptual framework and key concepts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 is a review of the literature related to the phenomena of effective instructional strategies linked to successful reading achievement of third grade African American males attending Title I public schools in East Texas. Although research exists about the needs of these students (see Tomkinson, 2016), there was a need for input from successful reading instructors and campus administrators. The research problem investigated in this study was an insufficient understanding of instructional practices linked to high reading achievement of third grade African American males in Title I schools in East Texas. The purpose of this explanatory case study was to investigate the reading instructional practices at three East Texas Title I schools pertaining to effective reading instruction for third grade African American males. I sought explanations as to how these instructional practices were linked to high levels of reading achievement (see Gray, 2017).

The research literature evidenced the problem to be of great importance with a need for further insight. Additional research about reading instructional strategies for African American males was relevant to the educational discipline (Dumas, 2017; Rowley et al., 2016; J. Williams & Portman, 2014). Newman-Brown (2016) held that input from teachers who successfully instructed the children was needed to address a gap in the research literature. Reading success for third grade African American males attending Title I schools in East Texas was of interest to educators in the area. Through this research, input and strategies were collected and reported.

The following literature review is comprised of four subsections. First, I review literature related to the study's conceptual framework, including Ladson-Billings's (1995a) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy and Vygotsky's (2004) supporting theory of social and cognitive constructivism. Next, I discuss cultural relevance in the elementary classroom. Third, I address the topic of educational needs for African American males. Finally, the major research on culturally relevant reading pedagogy is reviewed.

Literature Search Strategy

What follows is a discussion of the literature review strategies that I used in this study. The literature review for this study encompassed a variety of words and phrases associated with the study's purpose, problem statement, and research questions. Initially, I used Walden University library databases and search engines. I then expanded the search using the Internet search engine, Google Scholar. Research articles, books, and dissertations were filtered from the years of 2013 through the present. If a specific search rendered limited or no response, the dates were expanded until resources could be located. Using the article, a search was initiated focused on articles that had cited that article to find an appropriate resource published within 5 years prior to the publication of this study. Only relevant articles that were cited over 100 times that fell outside of the 5-year time frame were included. The only alternative to this process was when researching the conceptual framework theory. Protocol does not require the research presented on the theory be within the 5-year time frame. Peer-reviewed journals were exclusively considered for article sources related to the literature review.

The databases and websites used to gather research material included Academic Search Complete, CINAHL Plus, Communication and Mass Media Complete, Directory of Open Access Journals, EBSCO Open Access Journals, Education Source, ERIC, Expanded Academic ASAP, Journal of Research Initiatives, ProQuest Central, SAGE Premier 2017, Science Direct Subject Collections, Taylor & Francis, Walden University dissertation database, Wiley Online, academia.edu, Baylor.edu, bc.edu, ed.gov, GeorgiaSouthern.edu, havard.edu, ifets.com, ijsae.in, jehdnet.com, Literacyworldwide.org, nih.gov, redfame.com, researchgate.net, uav.ro, wayne.edu, and wku.edu. Phrases used in Boolean searches included *3rd grade reading instruction AND African American males, African American males AND reading instruction AND third grade, teaching African American males to read, third grade reading instruction AND African American males,* and the problem statement. Keywords and combinations of key terms used in Boolean searches included *academic failure, African American, assessment, at-risk students, cognitive constructivism, constructivism, cultural relevance, education, educational practices, elementary, general education, instruction, instructional strategies, intervention, literacy, males, mastery learning, poverty, reading, reading strategies, reform, response-to-intervention, response to intervention, RtI, social constructivism, Texas, theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, theory of social and cognitive constructivism, third grade,* and *tiered instruction*. The articles that addressed the focus of the study based on the conceptual framework, problem, and purpose were selected and reviewed with specific attention to the relevant content and findings.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was comprised of Ladson-Billings's (2014) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, a theory supported by Vygotsky's (2004) theory of cognitive and social constructivism. The theory of culturally relevant pedagogy incorporates culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), the pedagogical practices framed by the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Ladson-Billings's theory, these pedagogical practices must be implemented in order for students to succeed academically. Therefore, the study's framework was built upon the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. CRP is a substantial part of that theory. The literature presented provides an understanding of the connection between culturally relevant pedagogical practices in reading and a high level of success for these students. This theory provides a foundation to understand the many factors that must be considered when designing effective reading instruction to meet the unique needs of third grade African American males attending Title I schools in East Texas. This framework connects academic success, cultural competence, and development of critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160) to the learning process of students. This discussion of the conceptual framework is presented in two subsections. The first section addresses CRP and its influence on students. In the second section, I describe cognitive and social constructivism with explanations of the influence of this approach on pedagogical practices and its connection to Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

CRP is an instructional approach that makes learning available to all students. Students are accepted for who they are and are provided methods to learn in manners most comfortable to them. CRP was developed through the research of Ladson-Billings (2018). CRP holds that teachers must funnel students' cultural strengths in a positive direction that causes students to desire academic success. Teachers take cultural differences, which might be considered by some to be negative, and direct them to the positive (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Thus, educators play a key role in CRP. By validating the students' cultures, teachers move students toward successful learning (Drevdahl, 2017).

CRP holds that teachers should integrate students' cultures in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Numerous researchers have taken this position (see Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Griner & Steward, 2013; Kourea, Ya-yu, & Owens, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). According to Griner and Steward (2013), this approach has been shown to be effective, and teachers who have adopted these approaches have been agents of change in their schools. Fraise and Brooks (2015) found that there is a need for acknowledgement of all cultures. These cultures should not be mixed together, but there should be an acknowledgement of all cultures to teach empathy and acceptance of all (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). Furthermore, understanding and acknowledging students' cultures has a positive effect on student behavior. With improved behavior, learning opportunities increase (Kourea et al., 2016). With this knowledge, teachers can better

understand the influence cultural integration can have on students. Therefore, attention to this aspect of CRP could lead to security and recognition through the learning process.

Gaining input from parents that includes their perspectives is a positive approach when developing culturally relevant instructional practices. Parents can provide insight into the student's culture (Kourea et al., 2016). A deeper understanding of the students' culture and heritage can limit bias because it can provide instruction and supervision for these students (Griner & Steward, 2013). Ladson-Billings (1995b) noted that parents have a clear idea of what is needed in a teacher. They want teachers who respect them and their child. These parents believe that this type of relationship leads to a more successful learning environment. When the teacher shows respect and understanding for parents and students, a mutual respect is gained (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Involving African American parents in developing an understanding of cultural practices provides insights concerning the views and understandings of the parents in relation to the school approach (Kourea et al., 2016). Gaining perspective into the views of the student population supports the CRP framework because I designed this study to gain insight into successful instructional practices for African American males in third grade reading. Gathering parental input can only support this process through open communication and mutual respect.

Ladson-Billings (1995a) has researched pedagogical practices for African American students since the late 1980s. Although her theory focused on what many educators would consider "just good teaching" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 159), she found that these approaches did not occur regularly in classes of African American

students. She explained that "culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria or propositions" (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). That is, there must be integration of three actions in the learning environment for true learning to occur. Ladson-Billings explained, "Students must experience academic success, students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). Students should critique and analyze social norms in their community and understand how civil actions affect them personally (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Academic success. Ladson-Billings (1995a) noted the need for students to experience academic success. In the case of African American males, often this scenario does not occur due to many factors (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014). These factors could be related to teacher expectations and preconceived ideas about this group of students (Wright & Ford, 2016). This could be a result of family interactions (Rowley et al., 2016). No matter the cause, all children have the right to experience academic success (Gay, 2013). Thus, this aspect of CRP framed my study by searching for instructional strategies that provide opportunities for the study population to attain academic success in third grade reading.

Cultural competency. CRP maintains that an understanding of culture and implementation of cultural competence is needed in all aspects of life. This is because "culture is a mediator of every day human activities" (Bal & Trainor, 2016, p. 329). Cultural competency is "the process and ability of an individual or organization to function effectively within different cultural situations" (Drevdahl, 2017, p. 6). Making

connections with individuals leads to goal acquisition (Drevdahl, 2017). Through careful attention to culture, all students have opportunity to learn (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Respect of the various cultures is necessary for students to develop a level of belonging (Boon & Lewthwaite, 2015). Cultural competence is a necessary part of CRP and should be a skill attained by all educators implementing the CRP approach to teaching. Without cultural competency, CRP cannot be implemented with fidelity. Cultural competence must be acquired and implemented in the CRP environment for full benefit to be achieved. Therefore, cultural competence should be a part of the CRP classroom for the target population to achieve the level of learning desired (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

Critical consciousness. The third criteria for CRP that should be integrated into a classroom is critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Critical consciousness prepares students to be aware of societal differences and how these differences affect the student (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Critical consciousness uses higher order thinking skills of analyzation that benefit students on many levels. Cartledge, Keesey, Bennett, Ramnath, & Council (2016) indicated that literature is a gateway to introduce and teach this concept leading to strong critical consciousness for Students of Color. It is the school's role to guide students to awareness of injustices in society. Through this approach, African American students' academic achievement will gain (Amin et al., 2017). Awareness of societal injustices has been shown to affect academic achievement positively (Dee & Penner, 2016). Therefore, it is vital to the fidelity of CRP to include student training in critical consciousness. Because this is an aspect of CRP, the concept aligned with the framework of my study.

Social and Cognitive Constructivism

Constructivism is the foundation for the conceptual framework of this study, Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (2014). The approach to implementation of CRP is based upon Vygotsky's (2004) theory of social and cognitive constructivism. While implementing this theory, students construct their own meaning through various approaches within the parameters of learning. Fraise and Brooks (2015) confirmed that CRP is a constructivist view in that teachers and students learn as they construct knowledge together. Implementation of a constructivist approach has a positive influence on literacy skills of minority students when implemented through CRP (Au, 1998). The thought process of constructivism envelopes Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Specifically, both constructivism and CRP indicate learners must make meaning from personal experiences in order for real learning to occur.

Constructivists believe that learners must have the opportunity to make meaning from what they are learning (Vygotsky, 1980). They must be able to make connections to their prior life experiences. This thought process should be taken into consideration when developing and designing curriculum (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Jones and Brader-Araje (2002) continued, noting constructivist teachers understand that students bring a rich array of knowledge with them to the learning venue, and that teachers must pull these life experiences into the learning experience. They must understand their students in ways that allow construction of the curriculum and instruction to meet the students allowing connections to occur, and continue, through the learning process.

Vygotsky had strong beliefs concerning the importance of culture in the classroom and learning opportunities. Vygotsky explained that children understand each phenomenon differently based on their own perspectives and experiences. "Vygotsky extended the emphasis on culture and society in his argument that all higher mental functions are social in origin and are embedded in the context of the sociocultural setting" (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002, p. 5). Vygotsky believed a student's culture defined who they were and that all students should understand each other. To do this, the students must have a clear understanding of each of their cultures. A teacher would be remiss to overlook students' cultures when developing learning opportunities (Powell & Kalina, 2009). CRP aligns with these beliefs (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Understanding constructivist beliefs concerning the need for culture in the classroom and Ladson-Billing's views on the aspects of learning provides insight to the close intertwining of the two theories and their relevance to my study.

Social constructivism is integral to the learning process (Kim, 2001). Learning constructs meaning and must be approached in a manner that aligns with the students' background and culture for the learning process to occur (Kim, 2001; Powell & Kalina, 2009). A child's culture affects their knowledge and learning. A child builds their learning upon cultural experiences (Kim, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Vygotsky, 1980). Culture affects background knowledge in turn affecting the ability to learn (Kim, 2001). It is wise for the teacher to take this into consideration when developing curriculum and instruction that will affect a particular group of students. A child's background knowledge allows them to construct meaning to any new learning leading to

higher-level learning (Kim, 2001; Vygotsky, 2004). These aspects of social constructivism provide insight to the strong connection between Vygotsky's and Ladson-Billings's theories and their relevance to my study's focus (see Ladson-Billings, 2014; Vygotsky, 2004). Thus, Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy built the framework of the study with Vygotsky's theory of social and cognitive constructivism as its solid foundation.

Conclusion

Throughout the review of literature focused on the conceptual framework of this study, there was a strong foundation for the positive aspects of the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. Many of the research reviews were current, but there were many groundbreaking articles reviewed as well. These studies were relevant to my research because they illustrated the importance of the conceptual framework to the needs of my target population. Throughout the various articles, there was a distinct need for further investigation into the implementation of the theory with different groups of students in various settings. My research will add to the vast amount of knowledge currently available.

Major Study Review Related to the Conceptual Framework

Continuing to show the strong influence of CRP and substantiating the purpose for choosing this theory as the conceptual framework for my study, Aronson and Laughter (2016) analyzed culturally relevant education. Their research focused on Gay and Ladson-Billings's research of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and CRP, respectively, in their study, *The Theory of Culturally Relevant Education: A Synthesis of*

Research Across Content Areas. Through this study, they found that for students of diverse backgrounds to attain academic success, these two approaches must be implemented. Social justice education is the focus of this approach to education—not only social justice in the classroom, but it is the expectation that this knowledge and approach will expand social justice to the community. Teachers of these students must understand how to incorporate culture into the classroom in a way that validates all students for who they are. They must design curriculum and instruction to encompass ideas and approaches that are far reaching and develop the whole student in a manner that allows them to take their education and academic knowledge and affect their community in a positive manner. Connections must be made between the student, curriculum, and community.

Aronson and Laughter (2016) continued to explain that teachers must understand they may experience controversy when implementing this life changing approach to teaching students. They must understand the strengths of the approach and be able to stand up for the students and express the impact CRP and CRT have on the whole student. This requires training for these teachers. Through implementation of CRP, students are empowered to step forward and make a difference. They become agents of change. The CRP teacher must evaluate all curriculum and instructional practices through a lens that assures CRP is taken into consideration prior to teaching the lesson. If the specific foundations of the theory are not in place, the teacher adjusts to make certain the focus remains clear and pure. A teacher should evaluate and analyze their teaching, including the curriculum and instruction, to determine if the focus of CRP is being

reached at all levels. The educator, who believes he/she has reached the summit, does not understand the approach. There is never an end to the evaluation process. Through CRP, students and teachers move learning from the classroom into the community and incorporate students' individual cultures. Learning does not stop at the campus. CRP educators are constructivists at heart. They provide connections between students, their learning, and their individual cultures. The students evaluate what they are learning against their cultures. They determine how these topics and concepts relate to them personally in all aspects of their lives. These students learn about everyone's cultures and develop a sense of pride and self-assurance in who they are.

According to Aronson and Laughter (2016), when CRP and CRT are implemented, there is an increase in academic mastery, self-confidence, and motivation. This has been observed when completing high-stakes assessments of various types. In order for this type of education to occur, an investment in these teachers, their training, and the implementation process must be made. Without this support, it is highly unlikely these students will see the success they deserve.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

There are many concepts associated with this study. However, the focus of the literature review related to the key concepts remained on CRP in the elementary classroom, in relationship to teaching African American males, and CRP associated with teaching reading. Throughout the literature review, themes were evident in all areas. Specifically, the research showed that the integration of CRP was beneficial to all stakeholders.

CRP at the Elementary Level

In this era, implementation of culturally relevant approaches make a difference for even the youngest student (Durden et al., 2015). For students to be taught effectively, teachers must be culturally aware, moving away from simply celebrating various holidays associated with the students' cultures and sincerely embracing the whole culture. This includes reading fiction and nonfiction pieces of literature that align with the diverse group's background. Bulletin boards and activities should be designed and aligned with the students' cultures (Ford, Stuart, & Vakil, 2014). Anything may be considered if it makes a connection with the students while recognizing their culture is powerful (Kelly, 2013). Therefore, I looked for these points during observations in the classrooms.

Durden et al. (2015) found that successful classrooms were abundant in culturally relevant material including literature, displays, and learning centers. Instruction should build on students' cultural backgrounds and expand to include other culturally diverse groups. This allows students to bring prior knowledge to the learning table and make personal connections that might otherwise have not been made. Through acceptance and embracement of the culture, relationships develop. Those relationships lead to stronger opportunities for learning to occur (Palincsar, 1998). There are strong connections between culture and learning. CRP is best practice when determining how to teach those students from diverse populations (Ford et al., 2014). These very young students are the perfect group to begin implementation of culturally relevant approaches. The earlier this approach is implemented, the more optimum opportunities will be afforded to our diverse student populations (Durden et al., 2015). Therefore, I assessed the literature and learning

stations in the class to determine if these align with the expectations of a CRP learning environment.

CRP and the African American Male Student

Throughout the literature associated with teaching the African American male student, the overall theme was relationships. Research showed the significance of strong relationships being built between the student and those in authority over the student—most significant, the teacher (Fries-Britt, 2017). Although there were other points made in the literature, this aspect of pedagogy was noteworthy. Teachers have the opportunity to guide a student to a positive academic outcome (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Gay, 2013). Gay (2013) specifically noted relationships and their connection to successful academic outcomes for African American students of poverty. Relationships not only support students academically but also lend support that may avert a prison stint for some students (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Furthermore, relationships allow individuals to build personal knowledge (Powell & Kalina, 2009). By understanding the strength of relationships, and the importance of these relationships, I considered this connection during interviews and classroom observations leading to more data to evaluate in consideration of the instructional approaches for the third grade reading students.

What boys need. African American boys are viewed differently depending on the perspective of the viewer. African American parents tend to set lower expectations for their boys in comparison to their girls (Rowley et al., 2016). Teachers tend to believe these students are not able to attain high levels of achievement. In fact, many teachers find these boys to be scary (Rowley et al., 2016, p. 301). In response, the boys appear to

live out these expectations (Wright & Ford, 2016). Through classroom observations, data were gathered to provide information about the teachers' expectations for this group of students.

The school community plays a distinct role in the ultimate success of African American males (Allen & White-Smith, 2014). This influence begins from the first day of formal schooling. Furthermore, research showed the greatest influence in these students' lives was their teacher. The teacher can propel the student to success, or he/she can stifle the student and possibly direct them down the "pipeline to prison" (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Coggshall, Osher, & Colombi, 2013, p. 435). It is the teacher's beliefs, expectations, and standards that make a difference for the student (Durden et al., 2015). Teachers revealed their views on these points during semistructured interviews and classroom observations.

The teacher is not the only factor in the process. Wright, Counsell, and Tate (2015) pointed out that African American male mentors are a very positive experience for African American male students. This creates a bond and understanding of what the student may be experiencing (Wright & Ford, 2016). African American males thrive on building relationships and knowing there are people who believe in them and their capabilities (Fries-Britt, 2017). Strong, meaningful relationships are crucial for these students. Developing relationships with African American males allows their confidence to grow. When confidence grows, students succeed to a higher level academically. They must be listened to and valued for who they truly are. When this occurs, discipline issues decrease, and learning increases (Kourea et al., 2016). These data were gathered through

staff members' semistructured interviews. The responding data were added to the collected data to determine the bearing of this approach on the student.

Importance of relationships. Throughout the literature, researchers found a connection between successful African American males and their relationship with adults in the educational setting—primarily their teachers (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014). African American males are often negatively stereotyped. Stereotyping students can severely affect their success and engagement in learning opportunities (Wasserberg, 2014). There is a need to investigate ways to support academic achievement of African American males at risk for failure (J. Williams & Portman, 2014).

Coggshall et al. (2013) noted the importance of building relationships with the students and having a clear understanding of the students' needs based on their cultural backgrounds. Without this bond, learning is less likely to be achieved at high levels (Hajovsky, Mason, & McCune, 2017). The earlier a positive influence is made on these students, the smaller the gap will be leading to positive outcomes for students who might otherwise be lost in the chaos that many endure in the current educational system (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014; J. Williams & Portman, 2014).

CRP. CRP is the educational approach proven best for diverse student populations (Ford, et al., 2014). African American males need to receive educational opportunities through an approach that makes learning meaningful to them (Wright et al., 2015). They must be engaged and affirmed by their teachers and see all students treated equally. This approach is essential to successfully guiding students through the educational system and blocking the pipeline to prison process (Coggshall et al., 2013).

Individual learning needs should be placed at the forefront when determining curriculum choices and approaches (Duggins & Acosta, 2017). Educators should note the learning styles and needs of African American students to determine best pedagogical practices for each individual student (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Bui and Fagan (2013) found that culturally relevant teaching has a positive effect on diverse elementary students in the area of reading. Specifically, the implementation of research-based strategies to teach reading through a culturally relevant lens was more productive for the ethnically diverse students.

Edwards and Taub (2016) outlined the significance to meeting the specific needs of elementary African American students when teaching them to read. Because this group of children has different challenges than their White counterparts, there is a need to understand the specific approaches necessary to support these students in learning to read. African American children have a high risk of reading failure (Coggshall et al., 2013; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). Therefore, gathering data to support reading instructional practices for this group of students was a very positive endeavor.

There are many outside influences that affect the literacy instruction of students, especially young, diverse students. Individual students' needs must dictate the instructional approach (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Those students who are not on level by the end of third grade in the area of literacy are at a higher risk for academic failure (Coggshall et al., 2013; J. Williams & Portman, 2014). Through consideration of cultural relevance, students were found to make better connections between the reading topic and

their initial level of knowledge (Djonk-Moore, Leonard, Holifield, Bailey, & Almughyirah, 2017).

There is value to teaching African American boys through a culturally responsive approach including multiculturalism (Wright & Ford, 2016). Teachers should receive support and training focused on these pedagogical aspects of education. The students' learning styles should be closely evaluated and integrated into the regular classroom practices. These students should have the opportunity to experience literature known as window books where they can see themselves, providing meaningful and authentic learning (Wright et al., 2015). Interventions must be tailored to the individual student. This is inclusive of academic as well as cultural needs (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014). Understanding CRP's vital role in educating African American males was important to this study. Evaluation of this key foundational aspect of this study held important information to determine if CRP was implemented on the focus campuses with fidelity.

CRP Implementation in Reading

According to Cartledge et al. (2016), students of an ethnically diverse background in lower income areas have been shown to be struggling readers. An approach that engages these students in reading needs to be found. According to Allen and White-Smith (2014), if a student is not reading by third grade, they are unlikely to be a strong reader and more likely to become a special education student. Application of CRP provides the materials and instructional approach these students need to make a connection between their culture and learning (Cartledge et al., 2016). I carefully considered these points throughout the interview and observation aspects of data collection in this study.

Instruction. With the Common Core curriculum in place in most of the United States, teachers find there is an overwhelming amount of material to teach. However, some teachers have decided to teach what they think is best for their students. They do not allow the curriculum to demand what or how they teach (Duggins & Acosta, 2017). According to Duggins and Acosta (2017), teachers have very little control over their choice of literature due to curriculum constraints. By following the prescribed plan and material choices, teachers are often required to teach every child and every class the same. This practice does not allow for differentiation for the specific needs of the students. Although, over time, there have been numerous points made about the lack of achievement by the African American population in reading, the curriculum choices and practices that are often chosen do not address the specific needs of these students (Edwards & Taub, 2016). Without the opportunity for teachers to determine the specific needs of their students, it is difficult to expect all children to succeed (Duggins & Acosta, 2017). These diverse students need explicit, individualized instruction (Cartledge et al., 2016). Therefore, classroom observations focused on the type of instructional practices used with a focus on explicit, individualized instruction.

Culturally relevant material. Educators must determine the best approach to reading instruction for ethnically diverse students. There is potential for teachers to use culturally relevant material to engage students in reading (Bennett, Gardner, Cartledge, Ramnath, & Council, 2017; Cartledge et al., 2016). McCullough (2013) found that a student's prior knowledge had more impact on the level of reading comprehension proficiency than the level of interest. This appeared to occur because the student was able

to make a connection between their own schema and the content of the story. African American students comprehended African American stories to a higher degree due to the personal connection they can make between the stories and their own life experiences (McCullough, 2013). Often, non-culturally relevant material may cause the student to believe he/she is unable to learn. Culturally relevant material provides a safety net that allows the diverse student to feel they can learn (Gay, 2015). Students should see themselves in the literature and curriculum they are presented (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017). Consideration of inclusion of culturally relevant material was evaluated within this study.

Using culturally engaging materials peaks a student's interest and stirs the desire to learn to read so they can learn more about what interests them (Cartledge et al., 2016). Integrating this material fosters a desire to learn in these students that allows a bridge to be built between school and community and support these diverse learners as they improve their reading skills. Culturally relevant materials are safe and positive for the students. The students have a level of comfort with the reading materials because there is a connection between the literature and the students' lives (Bui & Fagan, 2013). They understand and can make connections. The materials address topics the students can relate to. As observations took place during data collection, evaluation of the instructional materials, and student engagement with the materials, occurred.

Major Study Related to Key Concepts

Wiggan and Watson (2016) presented a single case study that was qualitative in nature focusing on the success of a school that incorporated many values of CRP with a

focus on racial education. Through student and teacher interviews along with classroom observations, they found several pedagogical approaches that were significant for a successful outcome to learning. Because most of the research literature available at the time of their study centered around the negative aspect of instruction and outcome for Students of Color, the researchers determined there was a need for investigation into the practices that have merited positive outcomes for these students. In doing this, they found several key factors to successfully teaching African American students. These findings were strongly linked to Ladson-Billings's (2014) CRP as well as Gay's (2013) CRT.

Through their research, the authors found that it was necessary to address the needs of the whole child (Wiggan & Watson, 2016). This not only included academics but the social, emotional, and physical needs as well. These students required a multicultural education every day—not just 1 month out of the year. Not only should the students be exposed to African American history, they should be exposed to all history, including all races and ethnic groups. This provides a well-rounded view of the world and allows for a full understanding of all that might affect them in their lives.

In the article, *Teaching the Whole Child: The Importance of Culturally Responsiveness, Community Engagement, and Character Development in High Achieving African American Students* (Wiggan & Watson, 2016), the authors explained that a student's culture must be validated. There must be an understanding between the student and teacher concerning culture. If this is not present, the student will suffer. When the teacher is culturally responsive to the students, higher achievement is obtained. It is the teacher's responsibility to be responsive to the students' needs and engage them in the

learning process. A teacher can support students' success or failure. This is a great responsibility all experienced, and inexperienced, teachers should understand. Furthermore, teachers must incorporate the various learning styles of all students because students learn best through various modalities.

Dialogue within the classroom must be open and honest. Understanding of race and its role in society should be clear and discussion opportunities provided. Although many of these topics are of a very sensitive nature, the teacher must provide an environment where students feel safe to discuss the particulars involved in the focus situation. Wiggan and Watson (2016) found there to be significance in the inclusion of culturally relevant literature where students are able to make connections between the literature and their own experiences. As many other researchers have noted, relationships are critical for African American students. A strong relationship with the teacher can be the difference between success and failure. These relationships are built when teachers have a clear understanding of a student's background and culture and are willing to integrate this knowledge into the classroom on a regular basis.

Wiggan and Watson (2016) focused on the "village" aspect of educating the students (p. 781). Within their study, they found there is a strong connection between successful learning and the incorporation of community members into the process. They also found that building a school culture through a morning meeting where students recite and respond to positive readings and poetry is a positive approach to the learning process. This approach addressed social interactions, learning to address conflict, and the need for lower student anxiety levels. Many students spoke positively about this interaction in the

school setting. The authors reported that this practice built strong student character. Integrating cultural awareness and community involvement has been shown to be extremely important to African American students. Therefore, awareness of integration of both aspects showed positive effects for this student group.

Strong teacher instruction and curriculum are essential to the student experience. There should be high expectations set for the students and an unwavering loyalty to their individual needs in all areas. The whole child must be educated. Each child is an individual and has specific needs that must be met by the teacher, school, and curriculum. In order to meet these specific needs, those involved in the child's education must have a clear understanding of who the student is and what they need. This is not an easy task, but it is a task that must be met by those in charge of their education (Wiggan & Watson, 2016).

Summary and Conclusion

I reviewed researched literature that identified a need for research concerning sound reading instructional strategies for young African American male students. Ladson-Billings's (2014) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy supported by Vygotsky's (2004) theory of social and cognitive constructivism framed my study. These theories provided background and an outline of findings that guided this study. Through a sound conceptual framework, this study presented strong data to add to the research community in the area of successful reading instruction for third grade African American males attending Title I schools in East Texas.

Through the literature review, I focused on the key concepts of my study, the elementary classroom, African American males, and reading pedagogical practices. The information provided insight into what has occurred in the past, what is occurring now, and what is needed in the future. It is never too early to begin CRP (Durden et al., 2015). The word connection was used numerous times throughout the review. Students must make personal connections in order to learn (Ford et al., 2014; Kelly, 2013). Teachers can guide a student to success, or they can allow a student to fail. Teachers are powerful instruments in the educational process (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Boucher & Helfenbein, 2015; Gay, 2013; Sandilos, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cohen, 2017). With this knowledge, educators can be prepared to teach students in a manner in which they can learn.

Within the review of literature focused on teaching reading to African American males, there were a multitude of thoughts, ideas, and strategies presented. The main theme that ran through all the literature was the need for strong relationships between the boys and their teachers (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Baker, 2017; Coggshall et al., 2013; Fries-Britt, 2017; Hajovsky et al., 2017; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014; Wright & Ford, 2016). The literature related to this area indicated there was a need to investigate ways African American males, at risk for failure, can be engaged and supported so they can attain high levels of academic achievement (J. Williams & Portman, 2014). Rowley et al. (2016) further addressed the need to find strategies to support these students. My study provided data that added to the current research in this area. Therefore, knowledge of this information provided direction for the study.

Finally, through the literature review, I addressed the reason CRP is a valid approach to incorporate into reading instruction with African American males attending Title I schools. The articles that were reviewed primarily indicated the need for these students to experience meaningful learning, specifically the need to address the whole child (Duggins & Acosta, 2017; Ford et al., 2014; Thompson & Shamberger, 2015; Wright et al., 2015). According to the literature, there must be culturally relevant materials in the classroom so these students see themselves in the literature (Dee & Penner, 2017; Djonko-Moore, Leonard, Holifield, Bailey, & Almughyirah, 2018; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2017). Integration of culturally relevant materials provide a higher level of student engagement and have proven to increase reading comprehension levels (Bennett et al., 2017; Bui & Fagan, 2013; Cartledge et al., 2016; McCullough, 2013). However, the theme that was readily stated was that each student is unique and has his own set of needs. These needs must be the teacher's focus when designing an approach to teach the student to read (Edwards & Taub, 2016; Snow & Matthews, 2016). Understanding this information further substantiated the need to determine how these practices influenced the target population's learning opportunities.

By addressing the research questions in this study, many of the questions and concerns voiced in the reviewed literature were confronted. The findings from this study added to the wealth of information currently in place. It was my desire to discover strong pedagogical practices that were implemented successfully with elementary African American males attending Title I schools in East Texas. This information can serve to support the students as well as the teachers who teach these students.

In Chapter 3, I will outline the design and rationale for the study. I will then define my role as the researcher. A concise and thorough outline of the research process will also be presented. This includes information on data collection and analyzation. Credibility and trustworthiness of the study will also be addressed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Three Title I elementary schools in East Texas have exceeded the reading achievement norms for third grade African American males (Texas Education Agency, 2017). The purpose of this explanatory case study was to investigate the instructional practices at three East Texas Title I schools pertaining to effective reading instruction for third grade African American males. This study was framed by CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Through this study, I aimed to provide explanations for the success of the students on these campuses in the area of reading.

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology used in this study. The research design and rationale are presented. A clearly defined explanation of the role of the researcher is outlined, followed by the specific methodology employed in the study. This information includes participant selection, data collection instruments, and procedures instituted for recruitment, participation, and data collection. I also outline the data analysis plan. I conclude the chapter with an explanation of the level of trustworthiness of the study along with the ethical procedures and practices employed. Finally, I present a summary of the entire chapter to provide a succinct explanation of the methodology applied in the study.

Research Design and Rationale

An explanatory case study was used to answer the following research questions:

RQ #1: What strategies and/or methods are third grade instructional staff using to present reading instruction to third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

RQ #2: What supports do campus level administrators and teachers report are being used to guide effective reading instruction for third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

RQ #3: How are instructional practices, in the research schools, perceived to explain, or not explain, the high levels of reading achievement of third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

Central Phenomenon

The central phenomenon of this study was the instructional practices implemented in the subject of reading in the successful schools. More specifically, the reading instructional practices successfully used with third grade African American males in Title I schools in East Texas was my focus of the study. These practices were critiqued through the lens of Ladson-Billings's (2004) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. I studied three schools that proved success in reading based on state assessment scores (see Texas Education Agency, 2017).

Research Tradition

Research was conducted through a qualitative explanatory case study. Because the investigation was designed to study a need of a certain population, in this case the third grade African American male population in Title I schools, an explanatory case study approach was appropriate for a study of this nature (see Jenkins, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A case study is an approach where the researcher studies a real-life situation in a naturally occurring setting to explain a specific phenomenon (Babbie, 2017; Yin, 2013a). An explanatory case study is an apt approach to determine the how and why of a

condition when the researcher does not have any influence over the case (Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015).

Through this study I found the how, concerning instructional approaches, and the why, concerning the reason these campuses have experienced success in the area of reading, with these students (see Yin, 2013a). Researchers implement an explanatory case study to develop an explanation about a phenomenon (Yin, 2013a). Therefore, I chose to complete this study through the implementation of a qualitative explanatory case study (see Gray, 2017; Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015). Explanatory case studies may be best suited for those studies that presume causal relationships (Baškarada, 2014; Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2013a). The explanation may build a link between the phenomenon and the cause concerning the how and why of the case study (Baškarada, 2014). Tellis (1997) noted that one use of an explanatory case study might be for causal investigations. Finally, Yin (2013b) stated, "A case study evaluation will in effect be examining causal relationships" (p. 322). This study was based on real-life occurrences, another characteristic of an explanatory case study (see Yin, 2013a). Through the findings of this study, I sought to explain how instructional approaches connected to the successful reading performance of the African American male population in third grade.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in a study should take time to reflect and consider his/her role in the process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As an observer, I conducted classroom observations and interviews with those individuals who were involved with the reading instructional practices implemented on the campuses of the target population. I only participated by

recording the data collected in the observation and interview processes. I also analyzed the collected data for evaluation purposes.

Relationships

I had no personal or professional relationships with any of the campuses on which I conducted research. I worked for the school district where one campus was located approximately 4 years ago as a classroom teacher and instructional coach. I, however, did not work on the campus in the district where I conducted the research. I never worked in the other two districts where the final two campuses were located. I never had a supervisory or instructor relationship with any of the participants involved in this study.

Potential Bias and Ethical Concerns

As a researcher, I reflected on my personal biases related to this study. Although there is bias in all studies, ethically, the researcher must be aware of these issues and consider each step taken to avoid bias as much as possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). With this in mind, I avoided bias within this research study. Through reflection and awareness, avoidance of bias was considered and removed to the highest level possible. I avoided my personal beliefs and concerns related to the instructional practices and approaches used on these campuses and followed the research plan judiciously. Through specific attention to the detail of the research plan, I avoided influences of bias within the study. I maintained a professional relationship with the participants, maintaining the behavior of a researcher. Thus, the level of bias in the study was minimized.

Methodology

Because the purpose of this explanatory case study was to investigate the reading instructional practices for third grade African American males in three East Texas Title I schools, the most appropriate methodology was a qualitative approach. Specifically, this study was conducted through an explanatory case study.

Participant Selection

The participant selection process was not one without consideration. I employed purposeful sampling to choose staff members of the top three high performing Title I schools in East Texas, as determined from the third grade state reading assessment scores for African American males, to interview (see Texas Education Agency, 2017). Purposeful sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, allows participants to be chosen based on the researcher's judgment aligned to the study's purpose (Babbie, 2017). Purposeful sampling is the main approach used in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It "provides context-rich and detailed accounts of specific populations and locations" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 128). The participants were purposely chosen due to their knowledge of the studied phenomenon (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Criteria for selection. Each participant was chosen due to their intimate involvement in planning and providing instruction to the target population. Tomkinson (2016) determined a need for gathering input from campus level educators—specifically teachers. Through discussion with the campus administrator and third grade reading teachers on each campus, I gathered insight into their perspectives about the phenomenon. Although the teachers' level of experience and ethnicity are noted in

general, neither of these characteristics was a criterion for selection within this study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted a need for transparency in participant selection criteria, including information based on required and nonrequired criteria.

Number of participants and justification. I interviewed at least three individuals at each identified school through a semistructured face-to-face interview protocol. These individuals included the campus administrator and two third grade reading teachers. In addition, the two third grade reading teachers on each campus were observed during a reading lesson. At the end of the interview, the observed teachers completed a personal inventory related to their instructional environment. In a qualitative study, there is not a specific number of participants required (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The sample size is not as important in qualitative research as in quantitative research (Levitt et al., 2018). The goal of qualitative research is to specifically answer the study's research questions, providing a clear understanding of the phenomenon studied (Levitt et al., 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Procedures for participant identification and recruitment. Through evaluation of the 2015-16 published state assessment scores, three schools located in the two largest counties in East Texas were identified based on the percentage of tests passed by the study's target population (see Texas Education Agency, 2017). These three schools' scores were significantly higher than any other Title I school in the area. Although this was a small number of schools to be included in a study, the districts in which the schools were located were three of the largest school districts in the region. The protocol for qualitative research does not require a large sample set (Levitt et al., 2018). The three

schools were located in three different districts. Two of the campuses were located in two of the largest independent school districts in the region. Only one campus in each district attained such high scores in reading for this population. Participants on each campus included the campus administrator and two third grade reading teachers.

Because the campuses were identified from the published state assessment scores (see Texas Education Agency, 2017), when the data collection process was ready to begin, I contacted each campus administrator by phone to introduce myself and explain the project (see Appendix A). I provided the administrator with options for discussion about the study, including a phone conversation or personal meeting. I followed the phone call with an email (see Appendix B) and/or a letter (see Appendix C) to summarize our conversation. In the email/letter, specific steps were included that had to be completed for data collection with a suggested timeline. In this communiqué, I requested to communicate with the staff to confirm all interactions for data collection purposes. Participating staff members were contacted in a manner approved by the campus administrator (see Appendices D, E, F). This included a personal phone call, email, letter, or face-to-face meeting. The introduction included an explanation of the study's purpose and goals, timeline, scheduling of the observation, follow up interview, and survey completion.

Building relationships with the participants involved in the data collection procedures was instrumental to the process. These individuals understood the significance of their participation in a study such as this (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It was my job to convey their importance to this research. This could only happen through

clear and open communication. Through this type of communication, I further obtained informed consent from all participants in the study (see Lambert, 2013).

Instrumentation

In a qualitative study, a researcher must use instruments to collect data and have the data available for analyzation. In this study, I used observations and interviews to gather data. I used the data complexity to guide the process of data collection (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used face-to-face semistructured interviews, personal reflection, and classroom observations as instruments of data collection. All data collection instruments were appropriate to gather information that allowed the research questions to be thoroughly answered.

Face-to-face semistructured interviews. Face-to-face semistructured interviews were conducted between the campus administrator and me and the third grade reading teachers and me on each identified campus (see Appendices G, H, I). I conducted the semistructured interviews based on a list of questions I developed that were bound by the study's research questions and conceptual framework. As noted by Rubin and Rubin (2012), the semistructured interview begins with a limited number of questions. These questions will be followed with other questions that require further explanation or naturally lead to further investigation as guided by the interviewees' responses. The semistructured interview provided more focus and direct connection to the research questions.

I developed the semistructured interview protocol based on Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (1995a) and the research questions developed for

the study. Further attention was focused on Gay's CRT (2013) approach as the interview questions were created. Integration of the research related to these researchers' numerous studies added to the validity of the research questions. In addition, the alignment of the interview questions with this study's research questions provided further validity to the semistructured interviews. I developed these questions to possess interpretive validity as well as theoretical validity (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 190-191). Through these questions, I determined meaning from the interviewees' responses, providing an opportunity to explain the phenomenon investigated within the study.

Personal reflection. Each classroom teacher had the opportunity to complete a short personal inventory to reflect on his/her instructional environment in the area of reading with third grade African American males. A survey entitled, *A Self-Checklist for Providing a Culturally Responsive Instructional Environment* (Provencher, n.d.) was used for this objective (see Appendix J). This personal inventory was presented by a bilingual special education specialist to be used in a very large school district by teachers to reflect on their level of incorporation of a culturally responsive instructional environment. The personal inventory may be used by anyone with access to it on the Internet. No formal permission was required to use this personal inventory. Teachers rated themselves at three levels: absolutely, in progress, and not yet. The use of this personal inventory allowed me to gain an understanding of how the classroom teachers viewed themselves related to their level of culturally responsive instruction. This personal inventory was appropriate for this study because it was based on Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (1995a). Therefore, because this theory was the

conceptual framework of this study, the personal inventory was appropriate, without modification, for educators' personal reflection purposes.

Classroom observations. Observations are common in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Classroom observations of a reading lesson occurred in two third grade reading classrooms on each campus (see Appendix K). Observations allowed me to view activities in a natural setting (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The observations occurred in the third grade reading teachers' classrooms. I scripted the observations during the time in the classrooms. A published observation checklist was adapted as a field notes guide to organize the observation's scripted notes. The *Equitable Classroom Practices Observation Checklist* (SIGnetwork, 2014) was adapted and renamed *Equitable Classroom Practices Observation Guidelines* (see Appendix L). The tool was developed to support implementation of culturally responsive practices in schools. It was published on the Internet for use by the general public and required no formal permission for use. The *Equitable Classroom Practices Observation Guidelines* (SIGnetwork, 2014) aligned with Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (1995a) proving its validity as a field notes guide to support the classroom observation process for implementation of CRP in the observed teachers' classrooms while teaching reading. The point portion of the original checklist was not used in this study because the document was only implemented as a field notes guide. The modified document aligned with the research questions in the study.

Field notes. Field notes are important to qualitative research. Implementing observational field notes allows flexibility and exploration in a natural setting. Insight

into the interactions in the observed setting can be gained through the completion of reflective field notes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Field notes were created immediately following the observation from the scripted notes. In this process, I sketched the setting and recorded reflections related to the observations in the form of observer comments (see Merriam, 1998). Furthermore, no conversations concerning the observation occurred until field notes had been recorded. A researcher's reflections should be recorded without influence of others. The notes were very descriptive and reflective. It was my goal for the field notes to present data that allowed the reader to feel they were present in the observation (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It is vital that a researcher determine the organization of field notes prior to the observation (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). I organized the field notes with the description followed by observer comments (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Field notes are considered a reliable method used in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). They "can improve the depth of qualitative findings" (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018, p. 386).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

For any successful research study, appropriate recruitment, participation, and data collection must occur (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Through evaluation of third grade state assessment reading scores for the African American subpopulation, the three Title I schools in East Texas with the highest reading scores for this subpopulation were chosen as the focus schools for this investigation (see Texas Education Agency, 2017). The three schools identified as meeting these criteria were each in different districts. Each school

was located in one of the two largest counties in East Texas. Two of the districts are the two largest districts in East Texas.

After written approval for the study was received from the Walden IRB, I contacted each campus administrator by phone and/or email. I provided a full explanation of the study that included the reasons the campus was chosen to participate in the study and how the study would benefit the campus and others. An explanation of the research process was explained with a possible timeline. The campus administrator provided a list of the teachers who qualified to participate in the classroom observations, semistructured face-to-face interviews, and reflective surveys. This process streamlined the communication process for data collection. Once a timeline was solidified and confirmed by the campus administrator, data collection proceeded with completion of the face-to-face semistructured interview with the campus administrator, classroom observations, face-to-face semistructured interviews, and personal reflections with the third grade classroom reading teachers.

Each participant was provided an informed consent. Through the informed consent, I provided a clear explanation of the participants' rights in this voluntary study (see Babbie, 2017). Participants were provided informed consent in writing, and I was available to further explain any questions associated with the informed consent. If the participant agreed with the study's request, he/she was asked to sign the consent form and provided with a copy of the document. All participants understood that their involvement in the study was completely voluntary.

I used face-to-face semistructured interviews with the campus administrator and third grade reading teachers, separately, to facilitate the study. The interview with the campus administrator occurred prior to the classroom observations. The teacher interviews occurred after the classroom observations. All interviews were audio recorded. I took notes during the interview. In addition to the face-to-face semistructured interview, the classroom teachers were asked to complete a reflective personal inventory at the end of the interview, on paper. Two observations in two separate reading classrooms, on each campus, were scheduled where I scripted the lessons. Each observation took place during one reading lesson in the teachers' classrooms on the focus campuses. All data collection took place on the focus campuses. Data collection was completed in no more than 5 days on each campus.

After the campus administrator's interview, classroom observations, and teacher interviews were completed, I notified the campus administrator. At that time, any questions the campus administrator might have were addressed. Furthermore, the campus administrator was informed that a final copy of the study will be presented to him/her. I will also make myself available to meet with the campus administrator to answer any other questions once he/she has the opportunity to review the final document, if so desired. Should the teachers involved in the study have any questions that were not addressed in their face-to-face semistructured interview, I was available to meet with them. Transparency and clarity are important to a study of this nature showing a high level of integrity on the part of the researcher (Babbie, 2017).

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis is an intentional plan of all qualitative research. A researcher engaged in qualitative research must follow a deliberate plan knowing there is a degree of underlying subjectivity in the data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Within qualitative research studies, the data collection, analysis process, and conceptual framework are closely linked (Babbie, 2017). A clear understanding of the specific facets of the data analysis plan led to an ability to evaluate the information presented in the study. In this section, an explanation of the connection between the data and research questions, the coding and analysis process, and the use of discrepant cases is outlined and explained.

Data and research question connection. Each research question in this study was evaluated and connected with a specific type of data collection process. Research Question 1 asked the following:

> What strategies and/or methods are third grade instructional staff using to present reading instruction to third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

The questions posed by this research question was researched through classroom observations, semistructured face-to-face interviews with the campus administrator and observed third grade reading teachers, and the completion of the reflective inventory by the same observed third grade reading teachers. Each of these tools provided data that answered this research question and led to an understanding of the strategies and/or methods used to present effective reading instruction to the target student group in this setting.

I designed the second research question posed in this study to examine the supports provided to the teachers by campus administration. Research Question 2 asked the following:

> What supports do campus level administrators and teachers report are being used to guide effective reading instruction for third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

Data related to this research question was collected through semistructured face-to-face interviews with the campus administrator and the two observed reading teachers on each campus individually. Gathering the perspective of the administrator separate from the teachers on this topic provided a unique view of what was occurring on the campuses and its value to the teaching and learning process.

The last research question in this study was designed to address the overall success the Title I campuses attained in third grade reading with African American males. This question focused on the main purpose for the study, to investigate the instructional practices at three East Texas Title I schools pertaining to effective reading instruction for third grade African American males. The third research question was as follows:

> How are instructional practices, in the research schools, perceived to explain, or not explain, the high levels of reading achievement of third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

The data for this research question was collected through all data collection tools. All information collected through the semistructured interviews, classroom observations, and personal inventories provided data that led to answer this research question.

Through use of the specific data collection tools, the research questions outlined in this study were thoroughly answered. Each tool served a specific purpose in the research process and provided the information necessary for in depth analyzation of the data. The research questions were the focus of the research study. The questions, along with the conceptual framework, were the concentration of the study. As such, all data collection tools were developed and chosen with these foci in mind (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Coding and analysis. According to Babbie (2017, p. 391), qualitative analysis is "the nonnumerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships." With this in mind, coding and analysis methods were determined. I used *a priori* coding followed by open coding of all data collected and finally axial coding finalized the coding process. This was accomplished without use of a software program. Initially, *a priori* codes were outlined. I then implemented open coding, allowing labeling of the information collected for topics and features that stood out in the data. Axial coding followed this process focused on the study's research questions. At this point in the coding, I developed categories to focus on concepts and develop the research study's findings. Through this method, data analysis occurred as the coded data were evaluated (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Discrepant cases. Discrepant cases are not unusual in research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). When a case does not follow the path that has been found in the other data, an opportunity for reflection and evaluation is presented. When a discrepant case occurred in

this study, I took the findings as an opportunity to determine the cause of the outlier data. These data allowed me to understand the unique needs of a specific campus or student group. An important part of research is to define findings that will challenge the overall conclusions of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Discrepant cases add to a well-rounded and thorough report and are received with interest and intrigue to add to the overall findings of the study.

Trustworthiness

This research study exhibited a high level of trustworthiness. All research studies should have validity, and trustworthiness provides that validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To be trustworthy, a study should address the problem it intended to address. This is achieved through several measures (Babbie, 2017). I instilled triangulation as a measure of trustworthiness within this study. Triangulation was evident through the use of individual interviews, reflective inventories, observations, and analysis of district data. From data gathered from the individual interviews, reflective inventories, and classroom observations, a complete picture of what must be accomplished to address the purpose of the investigation was achieved. Using triangulation not only provided internal validity, or credibility, to the study, it lent dependability to the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). External validity, transferability, was accomplished through the inclusion of three separate school campuses in three separate school districts in East Texas. Gathering data based on the study's research questions and conceptual framework gained a great amount of information that provided deep insight into the practices used on the three campuses. Confirmability is an important aspect of trustworthiness in a research study (Babbie,

2017). This point is dependent on the researcher. Through implementation of reflexivity, I was cautiously aware of my own bias concerning this study. I set aside specific time to reflect on the research process and my views of the process. I was transparent in all my interactions with the participants in the study. Transparency was necessary for an unbiased study to occur (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I was aware of my biases in this process and was deliberate with my choice of words and approaches. As needed, I sought counsel from my committee to determine if adjustments should be made to maintain the confirmability of the study. I used *a priori*, open, and axial coding practices cautiously and consistently throughout the data analysis phase of the study to provide validity in the data analysis. All these steps led to a high level of trustworthiness in this research study (Babbie, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Ethical Procedures

Ethical issues are of great concern in research studies (Babbie, 2017). With this in mind, careful attention to the treatment of humans in this study was considered. All research participants read and signed an informed consent document that included Walden University's IRB approval number for this study: 06-06-18-0015357. This research study was completely voluntary, and the participants could decline their participation status at any time without any adverse response. I was in no position to influence the participants' professional status in any manner. I was not associated with any of the school campuses or school districts focused in this research study. Furthermore, there was no material or financial incentives associated with the level of participation in the study. No personal information was presented in the final dissertation

document. I will keep all data in a secure receptacle for 5 years. All electronic data are stored on a back-up hard drive device. This data will be destroyed after 5 years. Consideration of these aspects of this study provided a study that met the high ethical standards of qualitative researchers.

Summary

In this chapter, the research study's methodology was presented in detail. Each step of the process was presented in detail as it aligned to the research questions and conceptual framework. All aspects of this chapter focused on the problem and purpose of the research study. With this in mind, the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and the study's methodology were presented in depth. In Chapter 4, the results of the data collection will be presented.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In this chapter, I present the reflections and conclusions of the study's findings determined through data collection. The purpose of this study was to investigate the instructional practices at three East Texas Title I schools pertaining to effective reading instruction for third grade African American males. Three research questions were presented in this study. The three research questions were as follows:

RQ #1: What strategies and/or methods are third grade instructional staff using to present reading instruction to third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

RQ #2: What supports do campus level administrators and teachers report are being used to guide effective reading instruction for third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

RQ #3: How are instructional practices, in the research schools, perceived to explain, or not explain, the high levels of reading achievement of third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

This chapter includes an explanation of the steps taken to determine the conclusion of the study. This information includes the setting of the study and an explanation of the data collection. Data analysis will follow, leading to an explanation of the results of the study. I also present information concerning evidence of trustworthiness of the study, and finally, a summary of the chapter content.

Setting

The study took place in three East Texas Title I schools that presented the highest reading scores on the third grade state assessment for the target population. As well as being identified as a Title I school, each of the campuses was identified as a bilingual campus. On each campus, at least one administrator and two teachers participated in the research study. On one campus, a new principal was interviewed as well as the former principal, who had been in that position for the previous 8 years. This provided two administrative viewpoints from this campus, offering a deeper understanding of the administrative approach at this locale. Two teachers on each campus agreed to participate in the study. The study included a semistructured interview, the completion of a teacher survey, and a classroom observation by me during a reading lesson. Five of the six teachers completed all aspects of their part of the study. One of the six teachers was able to complete the interview and teacher's survey. However, she was reassigned to a different grade level before the classroom observation was completed. This was the only condition that could affect the interpretation of the study's results.

The three campuses identified through state assessment scores were included in the study. Of the four administrators included in the study, three were African American women, and one was a White woman. The administrators had been employed as educators for 10 to 33 years, with experience as a campus administrator ranging from 3 days to 8 years. Of the six teachers included in the study, two were African American women, and four were White women. The teachers had been employed as educators for 6 to 22 years, with experience as a third grade reading teacher on these campuses ranging

from 1 to 11 years. The inclusion of these personnel added credibility to the information they shared during the data collection process due to the level of experience of each of the educators. Therefore, the data are rich in information relevant to the study.

Data Collection

This study included three Title I elementary campuses in the East Texas region that scored the highest on the state assessment in reading for the study's target population. On each of the campuses, at least one administrator and two teachers participated in this case study. On one campus, there was a new principal in place. The former principal agreed to participate to allow for more historical data to be included in the collection process. A semistructured interview was conducted with each campus administrator and third grade classroom teacher. Each third grade classroom teacher also completed a reflective teacher survey to provide the teacher's perspective of their teaching style and cultural awareness related to the focus population of the study. All interviews and surveys, except one, took place on the respective campuses. The last meeting took place at a local business. Five of the six teachers participated in one classroom observation during a reading lesson. The sixth classroom teacher was reassigned to a lower grade level before the classroom observation could be completed. Therefore, only five classroom observations were completed for data collection purposes.

All interviews were completed between the educator and me. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour. I took notes by hand and typed notes within a word processing program. The interviews were electronically recorded. When the interviews were completed, each interview was transcribed for purposes of data analysis. Each reflective

survey was completed by the classroom teacher by hand and given to me. The surveys took the teachers approximately 15 minutes to complete. The classroom observations were completed during a reading class in the teachers' classrooms. The observations lasted from 1 to 3 hours due to different schedules and availability of the teacher participants. During the observations, I took notes, guided by the field notes guide, by hand and using a word processing program. I also drew a sketch of each classroom arrangement. There were no variations in the data collection from the planned approach, save the one classroom observation change due to the teacher's reassignment.

I considered the importance of attention to accurate data collection and maintained this mindset throughout the data collection process. Each step of the process was carefully addressed and followed. Through careful attention to the data collection plan, the data were collected without incident. This lent higher credibility to the study's outcome (see Cope, 2014).

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with setting *a priori* codes that aligned with the study's conceptual framework. As inductive analysis of the data convened, more codes were added through open coding. Finally, I used axial coding to relate the codes to each other. Following this process provided an opportunity for a clear understanding of the data findings.

Open coding was used to organize all information collected for any topic that stood out in the collected data. Open coding is first level coding (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I considered and labeled the data. Following open coding, I assigned and used axial codes

based partially on the study's hypothesis, problem statement, and research questions. Axial coding provides a way to evaluate how the different concepts and ideas functioned in relationship to one another (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The process of coding was used to develop the findings of the research study as it related to the "concepts, themes, events, and examples" of the study's problem (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 192).

The data codes were developed to align with the conceptual framework, research questions, problem statement, and hypothesis. In addition to the codes associated with these aspects of the study, I included a demographic (DEM) code. The codes associated with the conceptual framework were cultural relevance (CULREL) and social and cognitive constructivism (SoCogConst). The cultural relevance code was then broken down to the three specific points of cultural relevance—academic success (ACSUC), cultural competence (CULCOMP), and critical consciousness (CRCONS). There was one code assigned to each research question. These codes included instructional strategy (INSTR) for those aspects of the data that focused on an instructional action plan, administrative supports (ADUSP), and instructional practice (INPR) for those aspects of the data that focused on an instructional method. The codes associated with the problem statement included instructional strategy (INSTR), instructional practice (INPR), and teacher perspective (TCHRPER). The code that addressed data connected to the study's hypothesis was instructional strategy (INSTR).

Themes

Within the data collected, there were several themes that surfaced. For example, the importance of cultural relevance was presented consistently throughout the

interviews, surveys, and classroom observations. All participants presented data that aligned with the importance of a focus on academic success and cultural competence. One educator, discussing the aspect of experiencing academic success, shared, "Once they [students] experience some degree of success, it's pretty much that you unleashed a secret code and now they're wanting more. They begin to strive for excellence, and they believe they can do it." In addition, all participants shared the importance of having a solid instructional strategy that meets the needs of the study's focus population. The teachers observed implemented many strategies that allowed them to meet the needs of this group of students. For example, the data collected during the observations and interviews presented choice as a very effective strategy teachers implemented with the study's focus population. Other examples of successful instructional strategies observed were immediate feedback, use of mnemonics, and teacher modeling. Through the data collection, it was apparent that there is a need for cultural relevance in the planning and implementation of instruction for students.

There were three strong themes evident throughout the study. The strongest theme observed in each aspect of data collection, with every participant, was the need for strong relationships. The next theme presented in the data collected spotlighted the need for educator collaboration. Finally, the data showed that high expectations are necessary for third grade African American males to succeed in reading. Understanding the importance of these themes as they apply to this group of students may support educators in guiding these children to reach the level of success they must experience in reading at this grade level.

Relationships. Relationships must be formed with students, as well as their parents, in order for these students to experience academic success in reading. One of the participating educators not only worked with African American males but is the mother of two African American males. When asked what she most wanted me to know, she told me, "It is so crucial that you build that relationship. You must have an understanding of those kids." She went on to share the necessity of finding connections that these students can relate to. In order to find these connections, the educator should consider activities that provide the opportunity to get to know and understand the student better. Something as simple as eating lunch and visiting with the student could provide this opportunity. The educator ended her explanation of the need for relationships with this comment: "The relationship is the most crucial key to getting the student to success." Palincsar (1998) pointed out the importance of building relationships and how these strong relationships lead to higher levels of academic success. Relationships are a positive approach to facilitating academic skills that lead to stronger reading skills.

Collaboration. The second theme evident throughout the data was the need for collaboration among the campus educators. The campus personnel presented strong collaboration in the form of professional learning communities (PLCs), or teams. In these PLCs, the educators evaluated student academic data to determine appropriate direction for instruction and specific instructional strategies to implement. Campus administrators participated in this collaboration process and supported the teachers as they developed individualized interventions for students. Most campuses followed the DuFour model of PLCs to determine what needed to be accomplished for each student based on their level

of mastery (see DuFour & DuFour, 2012). One administrator supported the use of PLCs to develop strong collaboration skills for the good of students by noting that within the PLC, she, along with the teachers, used the data to determine weaknesses that needed to be addressed, but they also looked at areas of strength to determine how that student could move to a higher level of rigor. She said, "We're looking at [those] data, and we're pulling and seeing the deficiencies with our students." The positive outcome of PLCs related to the implementation of CRP was confirmed in a study conducted by Benegas (2014). Collaboration in a PLC setting provides a nonthreatening environment where educators can discuss CRP based instructional strategies to address the needs of their students. Using a team mindset to determine best approaches to appropriate academic strategies is a positive tactic to address the needs of this group of students (Edwards & Taub, 2016; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014).

High expectations. The last theme evident from the collected data was setting high expectations for students as well as educators. Students often meet the expectations set before them (Wright & Ford, 2016), and educators do the same. One administrator shared the importance of holding teachers, as well as herself, to high expectations. Because she felt the overall goal was to provide a successful educational experience for the students, everyone must be held to high expectations in order to meet that goal.

The educators in this study clearly indicated that they had experienced positive results from setting high expectations for the African American male students in their classrooms. One teacher was transparent when she stated, "We don't show apathy. We let them know that they will, and they can, rise above this [referring to the external factors

that might affect their emotions].” This group of students received high levels of emotional support from their teachers and administrators even though the students were not allowed to make excuses for their circumstances. Through perseverance and great levels of support, the boys were able to succeed at a high level because these educators took an approach that would not allow any problem to be too big.

Discrepant cases. Although it is not unusual to find discrepant cases in research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), there was only one observation that included some discrepant data. In this group of data, the teacher clearly noted that she did not consider anything different for the African American male students. She indicated that she only considered academic data when determining the students’ needs. She further stated, after the completion of the interview and survey, that she realized there was a need to address some of the cultural relevance issues affecting the students’ lives.

From other comments made by the teacher during the interview and classroom observation, I found that she did consider some student issues subconsciously. For example, the teacher provided a lengthy explanation concerning how she considered the students’ home lives, the parents’ livelihoods, and previous interactions with adults. She attended training that emphasized a need for consideration of the students’ modes of communication. She stated, “I may think it comes across as disrespectful, but if that is how they speak in their home, that’s what they know.” She mentioned differentiation for each student as well as building relationships with the students and recognizing hardships occurring within their homes. Therefore, although the teacher initially shared what could be considered as outlier data, it was apparent from the classroom observation, and data

collected during the teacher interview, that she adjusted instruction for each student so that the students obtained academic success.

Results

The results of the qualitative analysis indicated that the phenomenon of successful instruction can be explained, in part, by its alignment to the constructs of the conceptual framework of this study. Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy clearly aligned with the approaches and practices used on each of the research campuses (see Ladson-Billings, 1995b). In addition, Vygotsky's theory of social and cognitive constructivism supported the teachers' implementation of CRP on each campus (see Vygotsky, 2004). On each campus, educators strove to be culturally aware and provide opportunities for academic success for all students. This is the foundation of the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (see Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked the following: What strategies and/or methods are third grade instructional staff using to present reading instruction to third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas? Each participant shared in detail the strategies they applied while teaching on their campus (see Table 1). These strategies and practices were implemented with a focus toward reading success for all children. Each answer received shared specifics for the strategies and methods implemented on each campus. Overall, the information shared was very similar in nature. The implementation of these strategies provided opportunities to build strong relationships between teachers and students as well as between the students. Most of the

strategies were discussed and refined during PLCs and/or team meetings through educator collaboration. Using these strategies provides occasion for educators to set high expectations for the students.

Table 1

Effective Reading Instruction Strategies and Practices

	Classroom	Campus	Other
Strategies/ Practices	• Act out aspects of lesson/story • Anchor chart creation • Chants/Raps for reinforcement • Choral reading • Clear directives/ expectations • Collaboration • Consistency • Daily formative assessments • Data folder • Differentiation • Discussions • Elaboration by students • Encourage • Explain the why • Facilitate learning • Failure is not an option! • Flexibility • Fluency phrases • High academic expectations • Ignore behaviors not affecting learning • Immediate feedback • Include all students • Listen to students • Make personal connections • Modeling – thinking and physical • Movement • Mnemonics use	• Collaboration • Data mining • Relationships • Response to Intervention (RtI) • Strong vertical alignment • Teacher/Administrator accountability	• Create DVD for home use • Parent academies for parent training • Solicit local volunteers to work with students • Stick with what works • Strong teachers with content/standards knowledge

(table continues)

	Classroom	Campus	Other
Strategies/ Practices	• Objectives posted • Pace students • Personal gratitude • Personal interactions • Phonics • Poll students • Proximity • Praise • Push!! • Redirection • Repetition • Researched best practices • Scaffolding • Set boundaries • Small group instruction • Spiral objectives and concepts • Strong classroom management • Student engagement • Student interest • Student ownership • Student presentations) • Think aloud • Transitions • Turn Pair Share • Visuals		

Relationships. Building relationships with students allow teachers to successfully implement instructional strategies that produce desired outcomes. Participants shared many strategies during the interviews and observations related to teaching state standards and allowing the instruction to be driven by the collected student data. Other strategies addressed the need for student choice, engaging activities, activities that allowed for movement, and small group instruction. One teacher noted that she saw herself as a "connector." She helped students connect what they were learning to what they already knew. She supported the students by facilitating the learning, but she allowed them to do their own learning. However, none of these strategies would prove to be successful without relationships.

Each participant indicated that without a strong relationship, students do not see the value of learning and working with the teacher. It is important to build a strong relationship with each student. The educators also noted that relationship building did not stop with the student but was meaningful for the family unit as well. Ladson-Billings (1995a) addressed the importance of relationships between educators and family members. One administrator, when asked how relationships influence learning in the classroom replied, "It's void," referring to the idea that no learning will occur without a relationship between the student and educator. This sentiment was shared by other participants as well. One teacher shared that she felt it would be very difficult to learn in an environment where someone was not comfortable. She stated, "If you feel safe, you are more likely to raise your hand, ask questions." When asked about the need for relationships between educators, students, and parents, another teacher put it simply, "It's

everything!" These findings aligned with Ladson-Billings's beliefs about the importance of relationships (see Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Relationships are necessary for true learning to take place and, in turn, is a viable instructional strategy to implement in the reading classroom.

Collaboration. The observations indicated that the participating educators implemented their instruction with fidelity to support the students as they reached their goal of reading on grade level. The participating educators understood the complexity of the standards and taught to the intended rigor of each one. The teachers had studied the state standards so they understood the state's expectations. With this knowledge, the teachers were able to support the students appropriately.

In addition to teachers supporting students, the students were trained to understand their personal levels of learning. "Self-awareness is huge. Students tell parents where they are on the norms," one teacher shared. To facilitate this, students used personal data folders to record their assessment data. The students understood where they were, where they are, and where they need to be. The collaboration between teachers and students and students and their parents allowed the learning team's relationship to strengthen. In turn, this team honed their focus toward the individual student's academic needs.

The teachers set up their classrooms in small heterogenous groups of students working together to reach a common goal throughout the lesson (Kagan, Kagan, & Kagan, 2015). With teacher guidance, group collaboration increased through this cooperative learning configuration. During the observations, there was a great deal of

group discussion facilitated by the teachers in the classrooms. Students were encouraged to turn to a partner, or group of students, and share their thoughts and ideas. During one of these times, after reading a section of a story, a teacher told her class, “Tell your neighbor what is happening.” After sharing with their neighbors, these thoughts and ideas were then shared out to the entire class by a spokesperson from each group.

Student learning is more effective when the student teaches other students (Freeman et al., 2014). Within the observed classrooms, students were observed leading discussions, debating topics, and supporting other students as they strived to complete tasks that ranged from reading a passage to writing a response to something they read. As the students helped their classmates, they solidified their own understanding of the content. These classrooms were learning communities.

Collaboration did not only take place at the students’ desks. Sometimes, teachers would send several students to different places in the classroom to collaborate and return at an appointed time for a full class discussion. This allowed student movement in a manner that was conducive to learning but not detrimental to the process. Other movement opportunities were offered throughout reading classes in the way of kinesthetic movements that allowed the students to act out new vocabulary words or chant definitions or statements. One teacher used movement for fluency phrases. Her students practiced their fluency phrases with “attitude and action.” The majority of educators involved in this study independently shared that, in their experience, movement was a positive approach to increasing retention of knowledge for African American males.

High expectations. From the data collected during the classroom observations, and individual interviews, the teachers on the three campuses implemented many of the same types of strategies during reading instruction. The teachers were intentional in their approach to reading instruction with a focus on student needs. These teachers set specific objectives for students to meet. They developed small groups for instructional opportunities customized to each student's individual learning needs. One of the educators stated, "I just can't start with third grade material. I have to start where the student is."

Every teacher also demonstrated differentiation strategies during observations. The students received individualized instruction in small groups or conferring one on one with the teacher. The participating teachers moved constantly throughout the classroom during instructional time. They facilitated, guided, scaffolded, supported, affirmed, encouraged, redirected, clarified, and/or collaborated with students throughout the lesson.

The teachers who participated in this study applied structured classroom procedures. The students had a clear understanding of expectations, and the teachers left no room for misunderstandings concerning the desired outcome of a class period. During one observation, a teacher stated, "Eyeballs should be on the words I'm reading." The students clearly understood her expectations. This did not mean the teachers were inflexible, but the students were aware of these procedures. Each teacher accomplished this through verbal interaction as well as body language and facial cues. The teachers repeated expectations when necessary so the students had no excuse for not following through. Although the students knew the procedure for attaining assistance from the

teacher, one teacher reminded the class by saying, “If you make a noise, I can’t help you. Show me with your thumb.” Another teacher consistently gave a verbal timeline for pacing, “You have exactly 2 minutes before we grade this.” This same teacher would use a countdown of, “4, 3, 2, 1,” to refocus students when they began to get off task. These approaches provided structure and a safety net for the students. No one in the classroom had the opportunity not to understand the expectations and routines that were in place for their success.

Most observed lessons began with a review of the previous lesson followed by an explanation of the lesson objectives for the day. These teachers did not assume the students knew anything. They made certain to build background for the students and consistently check for understanding. Many teachers used a *think aloud* approach to accomplish this task (see Wilhelm, 2013). The teacher used a whisper, or different facial expression, to indicate they were sharing what they were thinking. They also asked questions to guide students to make personal connections to the lesson.

Students were consistently and intentionally engaged throughout the lessons. All students were included in discussions, whether they volunteered or not. Students had to prove, or justify, their responses. A yes or no response was not accepted. Teachers asked many open-ended questions providing opportunities for greater in-depth discussions.

Conclusion. The first research question focused on strategies and/or methods the instructional staff implemented to successfully teach reading to third grade African American males on their campuses. The strategies implemented by the educators on these campuses focused on three themes—building strong relationships, collaboration between

educators and students, and setting high expectations for students as well as educators. Maintaining focus on these themes when determining the appropriateness of the instructional strategies and/or methods provided a positive approach to successful instruction.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked the following: What supports do campus level administrators and teachers report are being used to guide effective reading instruction for third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas? Overall, the responses were similar between campus administrators and classroom teachers. One administrator summed up the thoughts of the study participants when she stated, "[We] do whatever [is] necessary to make sure the students are successful." From the data collected, there was evidence to show that this group of educators were committed to step up and make certain they were doing everything possible to help students succeed.

All participants, except for one, shared that there were positive supports in place from the campus administration. Often there is a discrepant response in a research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This may occur due to a misunderstanding of the inquiry or situations surrounding the individual being interviewed. In this case, the participant believed she received little to no support from the campus level administration. However, this teacher reported that she received some support from the district through instructional coaches. The participant was unable to verbalize why she believed this to be the case except to state that this was what she had experienced in her current position.

Relationships. Each administrator shared their belief for the need of strong relationships with students. Students must realize they are cared for by those who facilitate their education. As one administrator shared, “I care, and I’m concerned about you.” When that relationship is in place, “kids will work for you.”

Collaboration. From the viewpoints of the classroom teachers who shared they received support from campus administration, the greatest amount of support came in the way of guidance focused on instructional strategies and practices directed to academic success for students. The specific supports the teachers received that reinforced this academic success included collaboration with other educators through PLCs and team meetings, data mining to analyze student data leading to instructional direction, strategies to address the needs revealed in the data mining, professional development for specific areas of need, provision of needed materials and supports, freedom to teach, time to plan, and flexibility. Without the administrator supports reported, the teachers would be hard pressed to meet their students’ academic needs. The team approach and open communication practiced on these campuses provided more favorable outcomes for students.

Several campus administrators stated that they gave the teachers whatever they wanted in the way of materials, noting that autonomy is key to success. Teachers need the flexibility to teach using teaching methods they find effective for their students. This flexibility is necessary so all students can meet the expected level of success and go beyond. As clearly affirmed by one administrator, “Nobody wants to be a failure.” Therefore, as stated by one of the campus principals, “If you teach the standards, the test

will take care of itself." Although teachers are expected to teach the state standards, they must be allowed the autonomy and flexibility to teach in a manner that allows students to succeed.

Professional development opportunities were provided for the grade levels, as well as individual teachers on each campus, as needed. This was determined by the campus administrator through data collected throughout the school year from formative and summative assessments as well as administrator walk throughs when the administrators visited and observed classroom activities. The classroom teachers confirmed this was the case. They focused on the positive influence the professional development had on their teaching methodologies and student outcomes.

With this in mind, the need for a strong PLC was discussed by all campus administrators as a strong stratagem on each campus that lent itself to academic success for all students. The statement, "It's a team effort," was heard numerous times in the interviews. No one stood alone on these campuses. The overall alignment of the responses to this question from the participants spoke highly of the commitment to student success on the part of all study participants.

Each administrator saw the value of collaboration. All educators on the campus were included. Through team meetings and/or PLCs, the administrators used collaboration to determine best approaches to teach the focus student population. Contribution from all team members provided varied aspects and input to yield the best education possible for the students.

High expectations. The attention to the previous two themes readily leads to the final theme of high expectations. High expectations were supported by the campus administrators for students, classroom teachers, and themselves. One administrator, when explaining her view of the need for high expectations, disclosed, "We want the productive struggle," implying the students will grow through struggle. Students should understand expectations set before them.

High expectations were not only set for the students on these campuses. The classroom teachers and campus administrators had high expectations in place for themselves as well. These educators were expected to teach and/or administrate at a high level of rigor. Checkpoints and goals were developed to measure the level of success for these team members.

Conclusion. Obtaining a positive outcome for third grade African American males in reading cannot occur only through the actions of the classroom teachers. It is a team effort. The campus administrators must be as passionate about success for these students as the classroom teachers are. Without their support, the positive outcomes experienced on the study campuses would likely have not occurred.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked the following: How are instructional practices, in the research schools, perceived to explain, or not explain, the high levels of reading achievement of third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas? Many data were collected that pertained to this question. During the interviews, classroom observations, and teacher surveys (see Table 2), the

following ideas were put forward by each participant. The high reading achievement of third grade African American males on their campuses could be explained by an emphasis on teachers building relationships with the students, data driven collaboration, and high expectations. In the words of two of the participants, “We push, push, push!” This group of educators did whatever it took to help students succeed in reading.

Table 2

Teacher Survey Findings

Survey Questions	Percentages (%)			
	Absolutely	In progress	Not yet	Other
I know the cultural backgrounds of each of my students.	50	50	0	
I integrate literature and resources from my students' cultures into my lesson.	67	33	0	
I consistently begin my lessons with what students already know from home, community and school.	50	50	0	
I understand the differences between academic language and my students' social language.	100	0	0	
I find ways to bridge the two languages (social and academic).	83	17	0	
I contemplate the home life of each student.	50	33	0	17_1
I consider cultural cues to evaluate my expectations.	83	17	0	
I consider how students' frame of reference can interact with classroom norms.	83	17	0	
I encourage students to talk about elements of their cultures.	83	17	0	
I encourage students to find many ways to share their lives outside of school (through assignments, discussion, writing, and so forth).	83	17	0	
I analyze the tests given to ensure that the questions have an assumption of knowledge with which students are familiar or will be familiar through instruction.	67	33	0	
My classroom visuals are representative of all cultural groups.	17	50	33	
I establish a routine to provide some important structure.	83	17	0	
I capitalize on and focus on the different modalities/ intelligences.	67	33	0	
I encourage interpersonal interactions and a sense of community within the classroom.	83	17	0	
I have an understanding of the generalizations for each of the cultural groups in my classroom (generalized cultural ways of thinking, acting and believing).	83	17	0	

(table continues)

Survey questions	Percentages (%)			
	Absolutely	In progress	Not yet	Other
I utilize cooperative structures and ensure that everyone understands their roles in performance of the task.	67	33	0	
I usually group heterogeneously unless the task demands another type of grouping.	67	33	0	
I find ways to engage all students in each lesson.	100	0	0	
I allow students to help each other or to work together even when reading a text.	100	0	0	
Cooperative grouping structures meet: positive interdependence, simultaneous interaction, individual accountability and equal participation.	50	50	0	
I model and schedule opportunities to practice ideas or concepts before requiring students to demonstrate or test their understanding.	100	0	0	
I provide a global view of an assignment as well as step by step instructions.	83	17	0	
I design ways to assist students to think about and understand the information.	67	17	0	17_2
Classroom is physically inviting and has a welcoming environment.	100	0	0	
Changes made to accommodate culture are essential to learning.	50	50	0	
Interactions stress collectivity rather than individuality.	50	33	0	17_3
I operate in the classroom as a 'guide' rather than a 'performer' in front of an audience.	50	33	0	17_4
I vary the use of culturally connected instructional approaches such as: storytelling, affirmations for success, imagery/visual thinking, call and response, mnemonics.	83	17	0	
I include and plan for the use of stylistically responsive instructional strategies: cooperative learning, KWL, Graphic organizers, Group investigations/ inquiry strategies, Authentic assessment, and Advanced organizers.	83	17	0	

Other responses: $_1$ – "I don't want to—traps us."; $_2$ – No answer; $_3$ – "Depends on the activity."; $_4$ – "Depends."

Relationships. The building of relationships between students and teachers was the strongest theme related to the level of success the students experienced in reading on these campuses. “If you don’t have relationships, they don’t try as hard. They feel like you don’t care, and once they feel like you don’t care, they give up.” This is the harsh reality that teachers who teach the study’s focus population deal with on a daily basis. One teacher explained her view concerning the necessity of safety very clearly, “You want them to feel safe first off in your classroom….You know I’m here. I’m going to be here all year. This is a safe environment….and then it kind of rolls in to academics.” Another teacher stated, “Relationships allow students to develop trust.”

This positive approach and support from all the educators served to make a difference for this group of students. One educator summed up the sentiment shared by all the participants when she said, “I’m not giving up on you, so you’re not giving up.” These teachers and administrators would not stop until the students experienced success. This approach is what Ladson-Billings implied when she said that we must believe in our students and let them know that we believe in them. They must experience success and understand that there is someone who will not give up on them until that success happens (see Ladson-Billings, 2018).

Collaboration. Each campus member who participated in this study had a clear understanding of the need for collaboration when using data to drive instruction. These educators understood the need for data mining of all collected data followed by collaboration to determine the best approach to meet the needs of each student, individually. One administrator stated that their campus “stay(s) on top of what needs to

be retaught" through the use of data. Using data, the teachers gained an understanding of what needed to be taught and how it should be taught to allow students to experience success.

An administrator noted the need to "teach the curriculum at the level of rigor and complexity that it's supposed to be taught." Providing early intervention for those students in need was shown to be a positive approach to reach a successful outcome. This information was gathered through the use of student data. The data were evaluated and analyzed through the process of data mining. Once this was accomplished, the data were shared with the students to increase their personal awareness concerning their needs and successes. One classroom teacher shared, "It's a self-aware thing. So I always let students know where their reading level is." Students do not understand their strengths and areas for growth unless it is shown to them. This is why the campuses included in this study chose to use some form of data folder for the students. Many teachers had the students share their data with their parents to indicate growth and areas for potential growth. Personal awareness and acceptance of learning responsibility aligned with Ladson-Billings's focus on academic success for all students (see Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

High expectations. According to the educators on each campus, high expectations were set for students. Evidenced through classroom observations and interview responses, the teachers and administrators did not accept excuses for lack of academic success. The teachers believed the students were capable (see Ladson-Billings, 2018). They found a way to bring out the best in each student.

One teacher asserted, “Every student can read and can rise way above their expectations if they’re given the right tools and shown the way.” This attests to the educators’ beliefs that high expectations must be in place. A teacher shared her thoughts that encompassed many of the ideas and considerations shared by the other participants when she said, “My number one goal is that they [the students] love reading because once the love is there, we can just do anything.” Developing that love of reading, and not letting anything get in the way of that development leads to a high level of success for the students.

Referring to the success of African American males enrolled in the third grade classes on these campuses, one teacher summed the process up very succinctly when she said, “We just make it a priority.” One administrator, when referring to the third grade reading teachers on her campus declared, “I believe that they’re very committed to doing what works.” From the data collected, it is fair to say that these educators are educators who never give up or stop trying to find ways to support students’ academic success. They are constantly looking for new approaches and new strategies to make a difference for each of the students (see Table 3).

Table 3

Interview Themes

Major Themes		
1	2	3
Relationships *Students and parents	Collaboration *Use data to drive instruction for individual students	High expectations *Set for students and educators

Conclusion. Each campus team had their own unique approach to instructional practice implementation. However, each campus team adopted the themes of building relationships, the need for data evaluation and collaboration with the educational staff, and setting high expectations for everyone involved in the educational process. Keeping these ideas in mind while evaluating and developing instructional practices most likely influenced the high levels of reading achievement of third grade African American males enrolled on these school campuses.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a research study is necessary for a reliable outcome that is supportive of the research community (Babbie, 2017). The strategies related to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as outlined in Chapter 3 were implemented without adjustment. All data were collected and based on the research questions and conceptual framework of the study. This approach showed evidence of trustworthiness in this body of research.

Throughout each step of the data collection process, I implemented reflexivity allowing for a keen awareness of any personal bias I might have related to the study. Prior to each data collection session, I set aside a time for reflection on the research

process and my views of this process. This same scenario occurred again following each data collection session. I practiced transparency with all study participants clearly outlining the process of the data collection, follow up steps, and final outcomes. This transparency was supportive of an unbiased study. Finally, I developed *a priori* codes followed by open and axial coding. I used these codes cautiously and consistently throughout the data analysis providing validity to the study. These steps led to a high level of trustworthiness for the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Transferable information from this study will be available for other Title I schools in the East Texas region servicing African American males in third grade. However, the findings of this study are not generalizable because the study is not considered broad but rather narrow (see Stuart et al., 2015). Therefore, it is unlikely that the findings would be supportive of other schools throughout the nation. However, because transferability is considered met if those unconnected to the study can use the information in their own setting (Cope, 2014), this research should be considered transferable.

Through following the strategies for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the trustworthiness of this study was confirmed (see Babbie, 2017). Supported by the use of multiple sources of data, triangulation occurred. Triangulation presents trustworthiness in a body of research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2002), triangulation is a way to check and recheck data coming to a sound conclusion. This was a goal of this study.

Summary

The consensus of the participants focused around the importance of building relationships with students. It was their belief that without these relationships, true learning will not occur. Furthermore, without relationships, academic success will not take place. Relationship building was the strongest strategy implemented on the study's campuses to successfully teach reading to third grade African American males. There was consensus that campus administration support was needed, and accepted, for the betterment of the students. The campus administrators found it to be important to provide the supplies and training needed by the teachers while allowing them flexibility to teach in a way necessary to experience academic success for all students. Through collaboration and open communication, this occurred on these campuses. Finally, the responses to the final research question were many and varied. However, the overall theme to the instructional practices these educators implemented that led to the success experienced with the focus population narrowed to three main themes: building relationships, data driven educator collaboration, and high expectations for students and educators alike. Without these practices in place, it is doubtful that these educators would have experienced such greatness from each of their students.

Chapter 5 will conclude the study by presenting an interpretation of the findings of the study related to the literature described in Chapter 2. An analyzation and interpretation of the findings related to the conceptual framework will also be presented. This will be followed by a description of any limitation to trustworthiness in the study. I

will recommend further research based on this study followed by an explanation of positive social change that could transpire from this body of research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the instructional practices at three East Texas Title I schools pertaining to effective reading instruction for third grade African American males. This explanatory case study was qualitative in nature. Researchers have shown that African American males struggle with reaching proficient levels of reading (Davis, 2016; Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). Furthermore, there is a gap in research pertaining to implementing effective reading strategies and practices for this population (Shamberger, 2015). However, third grade African American males at three East Texas Title I schools demonstrated exceptionally high reading proficiency. The problem addressed in this study was insufficient understanding of instructional practices linked to high reading achievement of third grade African American males in Title I schools in East Texas. Guided by Ladson-Billings's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, which builds upon academic success, cultural competence, and development of critical consciousness, and supported by Vygotsky's theory of social and cognitive constructivism, I investigated the reading instructional practices of the three schools (see Rowley et al., 2016; J. Williams & Portman, 2014).

This study was based on the following research questions:

RQ #1: What strategies and/or methods are third grade instructional staff using to present reading instruction to third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

RQ #2: What supports do campus level administrators and teachers report are being used to guide effective reading instruction for third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

RQ #3: How are instructional practices, in the research schools, perceived to explain, or not explain, the high levels of reading achievement of third grade African American males enrolled in three high-performing Title I schools in East Texas?

The key findings from the study aligned with the study's conceptual framework. Through data collection and analysis, I found that the most important strategy implemented by the three successful campuses was the aspect of building relationships with each student. According to the data, without this relationship, learning will not occur. When the relationship is in place, the study's focus population members desire to work with, and for, the teacher. In addition to the necessity of building relationships, there were other strategies that were effectively implemented.

Interpretation of the Findings

An interpretation of the study's findings is presented below and then compared to what was presented from peer-reviewed literature in the Chapter 2 literature review. I also explore each research question through the data collected during the data collection process and related to the literature review material. The data and literature are ascertained to confirm or disconfirm each other. Finally, I detail an overview of how the collected data and the study's conceptual framework align.

Research Question 1

RQ#1 focused on strategies and methods implemented to teach reading to African American males in third grade on Title I campuses in East Texas. The information was gathered on three elementary campuses. The data were similar on each campus. This information can benefit teachers as they plan appropriate reading instruction for similar populations. In turn, members of the study's focus population can benefit through more effective reading instruction leading to greater academic achievement.

Data. All participants stressed the importance of using data to determine the individual needs of the students. This aligned with the research included in the literature review, which noted the need to gather data on the reading skills of each student (Edwards & Taub, 2016). Because my focus population historically struggles in the area of reading, these data should be used to determine the direction of the instruction. Without an understanding of the academic needs of the study's population, students cannot reach an appropriate level of proficiency (Duggins & Acosta, 2017). Snow and Matthews (2016) stated that individual student needs must direct instruction. Through data collection, educators better understand the specific learning needs of each student (Thompson & Shamberger, 2015). Data are important to student success in reading. The need for using data to direct instruction confirmed the findings in the literature review.

Student choice. Ladson-Billings (2018) found that students should have the opportunity to choose within the learning process. The study's participants shared this same opinion when interviewed. From interview data, the participants concurred that African American males were more willing to complete assignments and learning

activities when they had input in the process instituted in the learning approach. Ferguson (2015) confirmed the need for choice for young students. The findings of the study confirmed the research presented in the literature review.

Engaging activities. According to the study's participants, teachers must design learning activities that engage each learner. This can occur in various ways. This mindset was affirmed by Coggshall et al. (2013) in research that confirmed the importance of finding connections that engage students. The need for engaging activities was found to be true specifically in the area of reading (Cartledge et al., 2016). CRP provides a way to connect the student to learning opportunities leading to higher levels of engagement (Ladson-Billings, 2018). Powell and Kalina (2009) encouraged the inclusion of student culture to increase the engagement level of activities. When student culture is considered, activities are developed in a manner that leads to strong engagement. The study's data confirmed the research presented in the literature review.

Small group instruction. One very supportive style of instruction agreed upon by the study participants for the study's focus population was small group instruction. The researched literature concurred with this finding. Interventions must be tailored to individual students (Cartledge et al., 2016) Other researchers found that there was a need for the type of instruction presented in small group settings. These researchers extended the findings to include academics and culture within these small groups for students to reach their full academic capacity (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014; Wiggan & Watson, 2016). Teaching reading using small groups allowed for instruction to be customized to meet the

academic needs of African American males in third grade according to the collected data. The research presented in the literature review and the study's findings concur.

Research Question 2

RQ#2 focused on supports provided to teachers by campus administration. The amount of support may make a difference in the instructional strategies and practices implemented by classroom teachers. Likewise, the type of supports may affect the effectiveness of the instructional strategies. Education is a team effort. All members play an important role.

Collaboration. Collaboration was a theme throughout the collected data. This included collaboration of teachers with campus administrators and fellow teachers. This collaboration was facilitated through professional learning communities, planning sessions, and other modes of communication. It was within these collaborative periods that individualized strategies were developed and plans for implementation were made. Collaboration can guide educators to make better choices for their students related to academics. They further can increase their pedagogical knowledge through collaboration (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Educators included in this study insisted that all students should be a concern for every educator in the school building. Although this was not specifically addressed in the literature review as a research finding, Ladson-Billings (2014) indicated throughout her research that educators should collaborate to determine the best approaches to teach each child. This implies that all students should be considered. The information gathered

through this study addressed the benefits of collaboration, thus extending the minimal knowledge presented in the literature review.

Data mining. Data mining is the act of breaking down data to determine specific needs (Ratner, 2017). In the case of the study participants, the importance of using data to understand individual needs of students was a focus. Throughout the review of literature, the need for interventions and instruction to be differentiated and individualized for each student's needs was mentioned on numerous occasions (Cartledge et al., 2016) Evaluating data provides an opportunity for educators to observe achievement gaps between groups of students and evaluate specific instructional needs (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014). In addition, Wiggan and Watson (2016) specifically focused on the need to address the whole child. Therefore, data mining should not end with academic data. Data should include other information about the students, including outside environmental data and personal data. Unless teachers understand what students are missing and what they need to learn, students cannot be expected to achieve (Duggins & Acosta, 2017). The desired outcome of the data mining, according to the study participants, was to allow for academic success while meeting the needs of the whole child. The study confirmed the research presented in the study's literature review.

Instructional strategies. Solid, research-based instructional strategies are key for the focus population of this study when searching for approaches that lead to student academic success in the area of reading. According to the study participants, teachers and administrators must have a strong comprehension of the content and standards so they can find strategies that meet the individual academic needs of the students. The campus

administrators in this study provided teachers with instructional strategies that were pertinent to the students they taught. Each campus administrator was once a classroom teacher. They did not stop learning and sharing once they moved from the classroom to the office. Each of the administrators in this study shared that they were very involved in visiting the classrooms, getting to know the students, and working with teachers to develop instructional strategies.

Appropriate instructional strategies should be put in place to meet the learning needs of each student (Edwards & Taub, 2016). Teaching through a culturally relevant lens, understanding the whole child, and using research-based strategies is a successful approach to implementing strong instructional strategies (Bui & Fagan, 2013). The literature review and the evaluated data both confirm the need for strong instructional strategies to be implemented with third grade African American males attending Title I schools.

Professional development. Each campus administrator was open to providing professional development individually or as a group for any teacher as needed. The administrators noted that the needs were based on academic data, classroom observations, and specific requests. Wright et al. (2015) noted that teachers should be trained in CRP practices. One of the administrators specifically noted that the teachers on her campus had received this type of training, and it made a huge difference in how the African American male students responded and achieved, not only in reading but in all subjects. The majority of teachers shared that they received professional development support through their district, on campus, and off campus as explained by the campus

administrators. The study's data confirmed the information presented in the literature review. Professional development offers support to teachers so they can in turn support students.

Materials. Materials are needed in the classroom to support learning. The majority of participants noted that this was a priority for everyone. Each administrator was open to obtain any requested materials. The common thread through the data was that the teachers need only explain the why behind the request. If there was evidence that the material would make a difference for student learning, it was procured for the teacher with the expectation of strong outcomes.

Within the literature review, a strong trend for the need for culturally relevant materials was evident (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). However, within the study's data collection, I did not observe culturally relevant bulletin boards, specific activities, nor literature intentionally aligned with one cultural group. Ford et al. (2014) noted this practice should be followed for successful learning to occur. Furthermore, the literature revealed that researchers have stated that successful classrooms were rich in culturally relevant material such as literature, displays, and learning centers (Durden et al., 2015). I did not observe these practices during the classroom observations nor was this practice mentioned as a successful approach by any participant in their interview or survey. Although all administrators were willing to attain any desired materials, the literature review research focused on the need for culturally relevant materials. This study indicated that attention to culturally relevant material was not as compelling. Therefore, the study's data disconfirmed the research from the literature review.

Freedom and flexibility. Many times, teachers are harnessed by the expectations of the school district or campus administrators. This may not be the best instructional approach for African American males. A theme that was evident throughout the data analysis was that the campus administrators believed that teachers should be given the freedom and flexibility to teach the students in a manner that best suited their needs in order to reach high academic achievement. This approach was confirmed in the literature review (see Duggins & Acosta, 2017).

Teachers should teach what students need. It is not necessary to follow a dictated curriculum (Duggins & Acosta, 2017). The students' individual needs should dictate the instructional route (Snow & Matthews, 2016). This differentiation was allowed on all campuses involved in the study. The teachers were allowed to do whatever it took to make certain that each child achieved mastery of the reading standards. The study's data confirmed the research presented in the literature review.

Research Question 3

RQ#3 focused on those instructional practices the study participants found to be most influential for reading success in the African American male population. These practices narrowed to relationships, content knowledge, accountability for educators, and differentiation. Each of these points have potential to make a difference for the focus group. Many of these points were addressed in the review of literature in Chapter 2.

Relationships. By far, relationships were the greatest focus of all aspects of data collection in the study. Every participant spoke of the necessity for strong relationships to be built with African American male students when facilitating high academic

achievement. Without relationships, learning will not occur (Gay, 2013). This topic was strongly confirmed through the data analysis and the literature review.

Teachers must respect a student's uniqueness (Boon & Lewthwaite, 2015). Relationships are especially important for African American students of poverty (Gay, 2013). Understanding the great influence a teacher has on a student, as noted by the study participants as well as the literature review, proves building positive relationships is fundamental to academic success (see Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Strong, meaningful relationships allow confidence to grow, leading to increased academic levels. These teachers and administrators value the students for who they are. When this occurs, discipline issues decrease and learning increases (Kourea et al., 2016). As noted by several teachers, as well as researchers Wiggan and Watson (2016) in the literature review, open and honest conversations are necessary with this population. These conversations help build the positive relationships with the students. These personal bonds often lead to higher levels of academic achievement (Hajovsky et al., 2017).

Several teachers referred to themselves as connectors. Kelly (2013) noted the importance of connecting with, and validating, the student. This aligned with Drevdahl's (2016) and Wiggan and Watson's (2016) beliefs that for successful learning to occur with African American males, their culture must be validated. Therefore, their culture must be acknowledged and integrated into instructional planning (Fraise & Brook, 2015). The acceptance and embracement of culture allows relationships to develop, and grow, leading to greater opportunities for learning to occur (Coggshall et al., 2013; Palincsar, 1998). As noted by all participants, there is a connection between strong relationships and

high levels of learning with the greatest association being the teacher (see Allen & White-Smith, 2014). Teachers should understand the potential they have for not only academic support but personal support as well (Fries-Britt, 2017).

Within the literature review, research indicated that African American male mentors were a positive experience for African American male students (Wright et al., 2015). From the data collected and analyzed within this study, that finding is not always the case. According to the study's participants, African American male mentors are not always the best choice for African American male students. This conclusion is dependent on the student's life experience. A mentor is a positive influence. The mentor can be a member of the school faculty or staff or a community member. However, it is necessary to find an individual who best connects with a particular student. There are African American male students who have had experiences with African American males that have not been positive. This was the case with one student I observed during a classroom observation. This student required a White woman as his mentor. This was the one person this student connected with. Therefore, this was the best individual to fill the role of mentor for this student. With this mentor, the student had made great strides over the previous school year and continued to improve academically and socially. One size does not fit all when choosing a mentor for a student. Therefore, in the case of the research presented from the literature review that noted the positive influence of African American male mentors on African American male students, this study disconfirmed that research.

Content/Standards knowledge. The data analysis indicated the need for a strong understanding of the content and standards by the teacher. Because there are so many

extraneous nuances to reaching the African American male student that must be implemented through teaching strategies, a strong understanding of the content, as well as the required academic standards, is a must for all educators. Ladson-Billings addressed this finding in her research on CRP. Educators must have a thorough understanding of the standards in order to facilitate a high level of student achievement (see Ladson-Billings, 1995a). The study's data confirmed the research presented in the review of literature.

Teacher/Administrator accountability. Although not specifically outlined in the literature review, many researchers alluded to the need for accountability for teachers and administrators. After analyzing the study's data, I found that this accountability is not only for one grade level or only the tested grade levels. All teachers must be held accountable for student learning. One grade level team cannot be responsible for all student learning. Each teacher builds upon the previous year of teaching and must work with the previous grade level teachers for successful student achievement. The other grade level teachers must be aware of the same needs the third grade teacher must be aware of. They must hold themselves to the same level of accountability and meet the needs of each individual student. This data extends the knowledge previously reported in the literature review.

Differentiation. Teachers must differentiate, or individualize, their approach for each student (Cartledge et al., 2016). Every student has different needs. It is the teachers' and administrators' roles to adjust for this and support a student as he/she reaches academic success (Cartledge et al., 2016). Kurtz-Costes et al. (2014) focused their research on the need for customized instruction for African American males. These

researchers found that instruction should be personalized for both academics and culture. This belief, shared in the literature review by numerous researchers, was confirmed in the study's data. Students must experience success. This can be accomplished through differentiation. When students experience success, they are driven to strive for more success (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). High expectations must be set for students. Boys tend to live out the expectations set for them (Wright & Ford, 2016). With that in mind, all students should be treated as individuals with individual needs. Through this approach, students have a greater chance at success. This data confirmed the research disclosed in the literature review.

Conceptual Framework

The study's findings, overall, confirm Ladson-Billing's theory of culturally relevant pedagogy supported by Vygotsky's theory of social and cognitive constructivism (see Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Vygotsky, 1980). Ladson-Billings (2014) noted the connection between CRP practices and high success for African American males. The data from the study confirmed the strong link between CRP and academically successful African American males because each teacher participant on each of the campuses implemented some level of CRP with their students. Ladson-Billings's components of CRP, which include academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness, were used by all of the study participants to some degree (see Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Critical consciousness. Dee and Penner (2016) found student training in critical consciousness to be vital for African American students to attain positive academic achievement. The teachers and administrators who participated in this study appeared to

understand and consider societal injustices experienced by African American males. However, there were no data collected to show these educators found it necessary to teach and train about the societal injustices referred to in critical consciousness. They shared that this group of students experienced social injustices and needed to understand the influences these injustices have in their lives. They continued by explaining that teachers should consider this when creating learning opportunities for these students. The study's data disconfirmed the research from the literature review.

Cultural competence. Cultural competence is needed for teachers to understand the students' academic and cultural needs. Through this understanding, teachers are able to connect with the students (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Simply validating a student's culture will propel students' learning to higher levels (Drevdahl, 2017). Each teacher observed, and interviewed, during the data collection process shared this same sentiment. In the interview process, the majority of participants shared the need to validate the student for his uniqueness. By validating the student, these educators found stronger connections could be created between the teacher and student leading to bonding opportunities. As the relationships grew, so did the learning.

As Ladson-Billings (1995b) shared in her explanation of CRP, cultural competence must be part of the classroom experience for students to achieve to the level expected. Understanding a student's cultural background, no matter the color of the student's skin, is essential to academic success. Educators must align learning opportunities with the students' backgrounds and their cultures (Kim, 2001). Including a strong level of cultural competence in the classroom allows teachers to better understand

the perspectives of groups and approach learning from their viewpoint. After completing the interview and observations, it was apparent that the educators included in this study presented students who experienced a high level of success in reading because they had experienced teachers and administrators who valued CRP due to the successful outcomes related to high academic mastery (see Aronson & Laughter, 2016). These teachers incorporated CRP in many aspects of their classrooms. This data confirmed the research revealed in the literature review.

Personal experiences. According to the study's participants, meaning is made from personal experiences. These educators noted that they must provide experiences for these students that they might otherwise not have. The teachers and administrators arranged various field trips and other experiences to support the students' learning. The students then took the experiences and built upon them to construct knowledge (see Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Prior knowledge has a strong relevancy on reading comprehension (McCullough, 2013). Personal experiences establish students' personal understandings based on their life experiences (Vygotsky, 1980). This confirmed the second part of the conceptual framework, Vygotsky's theory of social and cognitive constructivism (2004). All study participants shared their belief that learning must build upon knowledge constructed while learning (see Vygotsky, 2004). For third grade African American male students to succeed in reading to the level of excellence observed on each study campus, these students must have solid foundations in place. These foundations are built through personal experiences. This data confirmed the reported research in the literature review.

Conclusion. As noted by Ford et al. (2014), CRP is the best approach for diverse student populations. Learning must be meaningful for African American males (Wright et al., 2015). Through implementation of CRP on each of the campuses included in the study, students began to feel secure. Feelings of security allowed students to become more open and willing to participate in the various learning opportunities. Once the students began to interact and participate, they began to experience academic success. Success breeds success. The students felt supported and loved. In an environment such as this, students will succeed.

Limitations of the Study

The initial limitations outlined in Chapter 1 remained throughout the study. I relied on current campus personnel for participation in the data collection process. Most teachers, and all principals, contacted agreed to participate in the study. On one campus, a principal had just begun her tenure in the administrative role. She was willing to participate in the data collection. To provide a deeper insight into the historical practices on this campus, the previous principal made herself available for an interview. These two interactions provided two views, enriching the data collected. During the data collection phase, one teacher experienced a position change. Therefore, she did not meet the criteria for classroom observation. On that campus, only one classroom observation occurred. However, this teacher did complete the interview and survey portion of the data collection. There are often changes in the data collection process. The minor adjustments experienced during the data collection phase did not serve to change the outcome of the data analysis.

Bias is a concern of researchers (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It was my intent to avoid biases throughout the study. I was cautious to collect the data I observed and heard without any input of my own ideas or thoughts concerning positive instructional strategies for teaching reading to the target population. I remained focused on the research questions and followed the data collection process as outlined in the plan. This allowed me to avoid any biases that could affect the outcome of the research study.

Recommendations

There is still much to be learned about instruction for the third grade African American male students who do not traditionally succeed in reading. With that consideration, there are several research topics that would add to this body of knowledge. A longitudinal study of one teacher with evidence of success with third grade African American males could be implemented over a full school year to gain better insight and perspective on how and why these students succeed. Extending, and narrowing, the study to one successful teacher could provide a greater amount of data over a longer period of time. These data will allow for trends to be analyzed and evaluated with the subsequent outcomes. Through this study, evaluation of instructional strategies along with approaches used to address the needs of the whole child, including attention to cultural influences, could be assessed (see Wiggan & Watson, 2016).

On a larger scale, a longitudinal study of one campus with evidence of success with third grade African American males in the area of reading could be completed over a school year, or even longer. This research would provide insight into the influence of the campus culture on these children. Learning opportunities do not occur only in the

classroom. Everything that happens at school has the potential to affect student learning (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). By evaluating the campus influence on student learning, an understanding of the direction campuses should pursue to support high levels of achievement in reading for African American males could be established.

Ladson-Billings (1995b) noted the need for input from parents. A study focused on parent input concerning what makes a difference for their children and what they want in a teacher followed by their personal why would be appropriate. Parents can add a deeper understanding of the students' culture leading to greater insights that support learning opportunities (Kourea et al., 2016). The findings from this study would yield a more complete view of the whole child.

The last piece of research I believe would add insight to this field is one that would determine if the strategies found in this study are effective only with African American males attending Title I schools, or if these strategies are appropriate to use with all low SES students no matter their ethnic background and/or gender. Ladson-Billings (2018) presented that the idea of CRP does not only pertain to African American students. CRP is a pedagogical approach that can be applied to any diverse group. If this is the case, can the same theory used for this study's conceptual framework be considered for other groups of students? This research opportunity could provide data to support students of other diverse backgrounds to succeed academically.

Implications

The findings of this study have the potential to play a role in creating positive social change for the teachers of third grade African American males attending Title I

schools in East Texas in the area of reading proficiency as well as the third grade African American male students attending these schools. Both groups may experience a positive change. The teachers will have more instructional strategies available to teach this student group. The students will benefit from the improved instructional strategies and practices.

Educators, who work with this student group, can take the findings from this study and implement the strategies with this population of students to improve academic success in the area of reading. Understanding how to reach the African American male attending a Title I school provides positive change for educators. Because this population has shown a history of academic struggle in the area of reading, understanding how to plan and execute reading instruction to this group will allow for less stress on the part of the educator, leading to more time to enrich learning opportunities. In turn, these enriched learning opportunities could lead to better academic and emotional support for the student focus group followed by higher levels of reading achievement.

According to the educators in this study, through increased reading proficiency for the students, other academic areas may be affected in a positive manner. As success spreads to other academic areas, further opportunities could be available to the students. These opportunities have potential to affect the child's lifetime learning potential possibly leading to a better social and academic outcome (see Allen & White-Smith, 2014). By improving academic outcomes, the possibility of improved professional opportunities increases.

Without the information in this study, many students could continue to struggle in reading. These students might never experience the level of reading success without the instructional strategies outlined from the study's findings. Through knowledge of these effective instructional strategies, teachers who serve this group of students are offered the opportunity to teach in a manner that has potential to reverse a history of failure and move forward to meet a new level of success in reading for these students. The data from this study have the capacity to be life altering for the teachers and students alike.

The information from this study will be disseminated to other educators through campus presentations. I will be available to meet and interact with educators who have interest in increasing their knowledge concerning successful instructional reading strategies for third grade African American males attending Title I schools in East Texas. In addition, it is my intention to present this study in a peer-reviewed journal increasing the awareness of the needs of this population of students. It is my hope that the information from this study will lead to a greater awareness of the needs of these students thereby improving academic success in reading for each child.

Conclusion

Educators enter classrooms every day ready to make a difference for every student they come in contact with. When they meet a group of students who do not meet the level of mastery appropriate, they begin the process of determining how to reach them. The subpopulation of third grade African American males attending Title I schools in East Texas is a student group who has not often met mastery in reading as evidenced in the state reading assessment scores (see Texas Education Agency, 2017). With this in

mind, this study was developed to investigate how a small number of schools in this region have helped this group of students meet an acceptable level of mastery in reading.

Through the lens of Ladson-Billings's (1995a) theory of culturally relevant pedagogy supported by Vygotsky's (2004) theory of social and cognitive constructivism, research questions were created to investigate how the teachers on these campuses were able to guide this group of students to appropriate reading mastery levels when others could not. Questions were crafted to present in interviews and surveys. Field notes were organized to use in classroom observations. The collection of data showed the importance of these theories and how they shaped instruction in a positive light for this group of students.

Knowing those students, from this subpopulation, not on an appropriate level by the end of third grade in the area of literacy are at a higher risk level for academic failures, provided an ignition for a quest to find a solution (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Cartledge et al., 2016; Coggshall et al., 2013; J. Williams & Portman, 2014). From the literature review and the study's data analysis, it is recommended that educators implement CRP on their campuses and within their classrooms. Educators should be aware of students' cultures and how they best communicate and learn.

The biggest influence in learning for this student population was relationships. Relationships were shown to play a strong role in academic achievement. According to all study participants, relationships were what made the difference for each student. When a child knows they are cared for, and cared about, they feel a level of safety that allows them to open up, enter in, and learn.

It is the careful melding of a strong academic climate with a supportive emotional, or affective, climate that provides the greatest support for this group of students. If nothing else can be accomplished to support the student, a relationship should be built and strengthened based on mutual respect and understanding. A strong relationship provides more support and strength to the learning process than any other strategy revealed. When a student feels safe and secure, behaviors begin to change. When a student feels safe and secure, learning can begin. Students who feel safe and secure are willing to take risks so they can experience success. Begin by building strong relationships with students and half the battle is won.

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Appendix A: Campus Administrator Introduction Phone Call Points

- Introduce self
  - Kimberly Whaley
  - Dissertation student with Walden University
- Explain purpose for contact
  - Campus has been identified as a Title 1 campus having successful results with teaching reading to African American males in third grade based on state assessment scores from 2015-16.
  - Explain the study purpose.
  - Explain the campus role in the study.
  - Verbally request campus involvement in the study.
  - Explain the steps requested for the completion of the study.
  - Offer administrator options for further discussion of the study
    - Continue on phone
    - Schedule a personal face-to-face meeting
- Proceed to complete conversation as directed by campus administrator's choice.

Appendix B: Introduction Follow Up Email to Campus Administrator

Dear [Campus Administrator Name],

Thank you for taking the time to visit with me on the phone concerning my dissertation study focusing on successful instructional practices in reading for African American males in third grade attending a Title I campus. As we discussed, your campus plays an integral role in the completion of this study. I look forward to visiting with you soon to determine the final decisions concerning schedules and completion of the data collection process. Please expect a letter in the mail soon. I look forward to working with you and your staff for the betterment of all students.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Whaley, MEd
Doctoral Student
Walden University

Appendix C: Introduction Follow Up Letter to Campus Administrator

Date

Campus Administrator Name
Campus Name
Campus Address
Campus City, State Zip Code

RE: Dissertation Study Information

Dear [Campus Administrator Name]:

Thank you for your time today discussing my dissertation study focused on effective instructional reading practices for third grade African American males attending a Title I campus. As we discussed, your campus was identified as a strong instructional campus in this area based on the 2015-16 state reading assessment scores. I look forward to working with you and your staff as I collect data that will help other Title I campuses implement strong reading instructional practices.

As we discussed, I will be on your campus to conduct a face-to-face interview with you and observe two third grade reading classes. After I complete the observations, I will set up a time to visit with the teachers to receive their input concerning the instructional practices I was able to observe and have them complete a short reflective inventory focused on their instructional environment.

I am available at your convenience for further discussion and explanation of the data collection process. I appreciate your willingness to add to the data available to help all children succeed.

Very truly yours,

Kimberly D. Whaley, MEd
Doctoral Student
Walden University

Appendix D: Staff Member Introduction Phone Call Points

Contact Content:

- Introduce self
  - Kimberly Whaley
  - Dissertation student with Walden University
- Explain purpose for contact
  - Campus has been identified as a Title 1 campus having successful results with teaching reading to African American males in third grade based on state assessment scores from 2015-16.
  - Explain the study purpose.
  - Explain the campus role in the study.
  - Explain the steps for the completion of the study.
  - Offer teacher options for further discussion of the study
    - Continue on phone
    - Schedule a personal face-to-face meeting
- Discuss and schedule class observation time, if appropriate.
- Discuss and schedule follow up interview and reflective inventory completion time, if appropriate.

Appendix E: Introduction Follow Up Email to Staff Member

Dear [Staff Member Name],

Thank you for taking the time to visit with me on the phone concerning my dissertation study focusing on successful instructional practices in reading for African American males in third grade attending a Title I campus. As we discussed, your campus plays an integral role in the completion of this study. I look forward to visiting with you soon to determine the final decisions concerning schedules and completion of the data collection process. Please expect a letter in the mail soon. I look forward to working with you for the betterment of all students.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Whaley, MEd
Doctoral Student
Walden University

Appendix F: Introduction Follow Up Letter to Staff Member

Date

Staff Member Name
Campus Name
Campus Address
Campus City, State Zip Code

RE: Dissertation Study Information

Dear [Campus Staff Member Name]:

Thank you for your time today discussing my dissertation study focused on effective instructional reading practices for third grade African American males attending a Title I campus. As we discussed, your campus was identified as a strong instructional campus in this area based on the 2015-16 state reading assessment scores. I look forward to working with you as I collect data that will help other Title I campuses implement strong reading instructional practices.

As we discussed, I will be on your campus to observe your reading class during one lesson, conduct a face-to-face interview with you, and have you complete a short personal reflective inventory focused on your instructional environment following our interview.

I am available at your convenience for further discussion and explanation of the data collection process. I appreciate your willingness to add to the data available to help all children succeed.

Very truly yours,

Kimberly D. Whaley, MEd
Doctoral Student
Walden University

Appendix G: Administrator Interview Questions

- Administrator's Name
- Length of time as an educator/administrator/administrator on this campus
- What is your philosophy of education?
- What reading curriculum is used in third grade?
- What specific instructional approaches for third grade reading are implemented on this campus that you believe causes African American males to excel?
- Do you believe the third grade reading teachers on this campus are different than third grade reading teachers on other campuses? If so, how are they different? If not, why not?
- What do the third grade reading teachers specifically consider concerning the focus population of this study in regards to reading instruction? Why?
- How do teachers influence students when they respond in a way that shows they believe the student can accomplish a task?
- How are students affected when a teacher sets high expectations and standards for students academically and socially?
- How do relationships influence learning in the classroom?
- On this campus, what changes have occurred in the third grade reading instructional practices in the past 3 years?
- What types of supports does the campus administration provide the third grade reading teachers in the way of planning and instruction that affect reading instruction for third grade African American males enrolled on your campus?

- Why do you believe the third grade has experienced success in reading with the African American subpopulation?
- What would you like me to know?

Appendix H: Third Grade Lead Reading Teacher Interview Questions

- Lead Reading Teacher's Name
- Length of time as an educator/teacher on this campus/third grade reading teacher on this campus
- Length of time as the lead teacher on this campus
- What is your philosophy of education?
- What reading curriculum is used in third grade?
- What specific instructional approaches for third grade reading are implemented on this campus that you believe causes African American males to excel?
- Do you believe the third grade reading teachers on this campus are different than third grade reading teachers on other campuses? If so, how are they different? If not, why not?
- What do the third grade reading teachers specifically consider concerning the focus population of this study in regards to reading instruction? Why?
- How do teachers influence students when they respond in a way that shows they believe the student can accomplish a task?
- How are students affected when a teacher sets high expectations and standards for students academically and socially?
- How do relationships influence learning in the classroom?
- On this campus, what changes have occurred in the third grade reading instructional practices in the past 3 years?

- What types of supports does the campus administration provide the third grade reading teachers in the way of planning and instruction that affect reading instruction for third grade African American males enrolled on your campus?
- Why do you believe the third grade has experienced success in reading with the African American subpopulation?
- What would you like me to know?

Appendix I: Third Grade Reading Teacher Interview Questions

- Reading Teacher's Name
- Length of time as an educator/teacher on this campus/third grade reading teacher on this campus
- What is your philosophy of education?
- What reading curriculum is used in third grade?
- What specific instructional approaches for third grade reading are implemented on this campus that you believe causes African American males to excel?
- Do you believe the third grade reading teachers on this campus are different than third grade reading teachers on other campuses? If so, how are they different? If not, why not?
- What do the third grade reading teachers specifically consider concerning the focus population of this study in regards to reading instruction? Why?
- How do teachers influence students when they respond in a way that shows they believe the student can accomplish a task?
- How are students affected when a teacher sets high expectations and standards for students academically and socially?
- How do relationships influence learning in the classroom?
- On this campus, what changes have occurred in the third grade reading instructional practices in the past 3 years?

- What types of supports does the campus administration provide the third grade reading teachers in the way of planning and instruction that affect reading instruction for third grade African American males enrolled on your campus?
- Why do you believe the third grade has experienced success in reading with the African American subpopulation?
- What would you like me to know?

Appendix J: A Self-Checklist for Providing a Culturally Responsive Instructional Environment

Description of classroom environment and planning	Absolutely	In Progress	Not Yet
I know the cultural backgrounds of each of my students.			
I integrate literature and resources from my students' cultures into my lesson.			
I consistently begin my lessons with what students already know from home, community and school.			
I understand the differences between academic language and my students' social language.			
I find ways to bridge the two languages (social and academic). □			
I contemplate the home life of each student.			
I consider cultural cues to evaluate my expectations.			
I consider how students' frame of reference can interact with classroom norms.			
I encourage students to talk about elements of their cultures.			
I encourage students to find many ways to share their lives outside of school (through assignments, discussion, writing, and so forth).			
I analyze the tests given to ensure that the questions have an assumption of knowledge with which students are familiar or will be familiar through instruction. □			
My classroom visuals are representative of all cultural groups.			
I establish a routine to provide some important structure.			
I capitalize on and focus on the different modalities/ intelligences.			
I encourage interpersonal interactions and a sense of community within the classroom.			
I have an understanding of the			

generalizations for each of the cultural groups in my classroom (generalized cultural ways of thinking, acting and believing).			
I utilize cooperative structures and ensure that everyone understands their roles in performance of the task.			
I usually group heterogeneously unless the task demands another type of grouping.			
I find ways to engage all students in each lesson.			
I allow students to help each other or to work together even when reading a text.			
Cooperative grouping structures meet: positive interdependence, simultaneous interaction, individual accountability and equal participation.			
I model and schedule opportunities to practice ideas or concepts before requiring students to demonstrate or test their understanding. □			
I provide a global view of an assignment as well as step by step instructions.			
I design ways to assist students to think about and understand the information.			
Classroom is physically inviting and has a welcoming environment.			
Changes made to accommodate culture are essential to learning.			
Interactions stress collectivity rather than individuality.			
I operate in the classroom as a 'guide' rather than a 'performer' in front of an audience.			
I vary the use of culturally connected instructional approaches such as: storytelling, affirmations for success, imagery/visual thinking, call and response, mnemonics.			
I include and plan for the use of stylistically responsive instructional strategies: cooperative learning, KWL, Graphic organizers, Group investigations/			

inquiry strategies, Authentic assessment, and Advanced organizers.			

Derived primarily from Creating Culturally Responsive Classrooms by Shade, Kelly and Oberg and *It's There: Talk about it*, NEA Today article, November 2006 (Provencher, n.d.)

Appendix K: Observation Protocol

- Classroom teacher will be observed by the researcher during one reading class.
- Researcher will script the observation through use of a lap top computer and pen and paper.
- Field notes will be developed based on *Equitable Classroom Practices Observation Guidelines* (SIGnetwork, 2014).

Appendix L: Equitable Classroom Practices Observation Guidelines

Equitable Classroom Practices Observation Guidelines							
This document is a checklist of 27 specific, observable teacher behaviors that reflect culturally responsive teaching through examples. This tool can be used as self-reflection or by an external observer to become more aware of incorporating such practices. Please note that the statements in red offer more definitive guidance regarding the equitable classroom practice.							
Name		Observer		Subject		Date/ Time	
Instructional Equitable Classroom Practice							
1. Arranges the classroom to accommodate discussion *Arranges seating to facilitate student-student discussion; Seating to facilitate teacher-student discussion*							
2. Uses a variety of visual aids and props to support student learning *Uses multiethnic photos, pictures, and props to illustrate concepts and content; Uses appropriate technology to illustrate concepts and content*							
3. Models use of graphic organizers *Uses a variety of graphic organizers during instruction; Encourages students to identify and use the task appropriate graphic organizer by modeling*							
4. Uses random response strategies *Uses random response strategies (i.e., numbered heads, color-coded cards, equity sticks, calling sticks)*							
5. Uses cooperative learning structures *Structures opportunities for students to learn with and from their peers (i.e., Think-Pair-Share, Teammates consult, Jigsaw, Pairs Check, Partner A and B, Boggle, Last Word)*							
6. Structures heterogeneous and cooperative groups for learning *Uses random grouping methods to form small groups; Explicitly teaches collaborative learning skills to students; Provides opportunities for cooperative groups to process/reflect on how well they accomplished the task*							
7. Uses probing and clarifying techniques to assist students to answer *Rephrases the question; Asks a related question; Gives student a hint, clue, or prompt*							
8. Uses multiple approaches to consistently monitor students' understanding of instruction, directions, procedures, processes, questions, and content *Uses a variety of approaches to monitor students' understanding throughout instruction (Thumbs Up, Unison response, One Question Quiz, Envelope Please)*							
9. Identifies students' current knowledge before instruction *Uses a variety of methods to assess students' knowledge before instruction such as: Word Splash, K-W-L, Anticipation Guide, Brainstorming, Webbing*							
10. Uses students' real life experiences to connect school learning to students' lives *Asks students to reflect upon and discuss the following: "What events/situations occur in your family or neighborhood that require some knowledge of ___?" How does knowing*							

about ___ benefit your interactions in your family, neighborhood, or school?"; Uses examples that are reflective of students' lives to support learning
11. Uses Wait Time *Pauses at least 3-5 seconds to consider the student's response before affirming, correcting, or probing; Pauses following a student's response to allow other students to consider their reactions, responses and extensions*
12. Provides students with the criteria and standards for successful task completion *Evaluates student work by providing performance criteria (i.e. rubrics, exemplars, anchor papers)*
13. Gives students effective, specific oral and written feedback that prompts improved performance *Confers with students to provide feedback to improve performance; Provides opportunities for students to use peer reviews; Provides written feedback that allows students to revise and improve their work*
14. Provides multiple opportunities to use effective feedback to revise and resubmit work for evaluation against the standard *Allows students to revise work based on teacher feedback; Encourages and structures opportunities for students to provide feedback to peers based on an established standard*
15. Provides individual help to all students *Ensures all students receive individual help*
Environmental Equitable Classroom Practice
16. Welcomes students by name as they enter the classroom *Asks students for correct pronunciation of their names; correctly pronounces students' names*
17. Uses eye contact with all students *Makes culturally appropriate eye contact with all students*
18. Uses proximity with all students equitably *Circulates around student work areas to be close to all students*
19. Uses body language, gestures, and expressions to convey a message that all students' questions and opinions are important *Smiles, Nods head in affirmation; Leans toward students; Turns toward students who are speaking to show interest*
20. Ensures bulletin boards, displays, instructional materials, and other visuals in the classroom reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds represented by students *Displays and uses materials (supplemental books) that reflect all students' racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds year round; Displays products and props from students' home and community background*
21. Learns, uses, and displays some words in students' heritage language *Posts some content words or phrases in students' heritage languages; Uses some words or phrases from students' heritage language in the classroom*
22. Uses class building and teambuilding activities to promote peer support for academic achievement *Structures academic and social interactions between students*

23. Acknowledges all students' comments, responses, questions, and contributions *Uses affirming, correcting, or probing to acknowledge all students' responses*
24. Seeks multiple perspectives *Validates all perspectives with responses such as: "That's one idea. Does anyone else have another?"; "That was one way to solve the problem. Who did it another way?"; "Who has an alternative view?"*
25. Asks students for feedback on the effectiveness of instruction *Asks students to indicate the learning activities that are effective in helping them to learn; Uses interviews, surveys, and questionnaires to gather feedback from students; Uses exit cards to gather feedback about instruction*
26. Explains and models positive self-talk *Explains the importance of positive self-talk; Shares examples of how positive self-talk leads to positive outcomes*
27. Asks higher-order questions equitably of all students *Asks analysis questions; Asks synthesis questions; Asks evaluation questions; Poses higher order questions and uses a random method for calling on students; Provides think time for all students before asking for responses*

Adapted from Louisiana State Personnel Development Grant (SIGnetwork, 2014)

Appendix M: District Letter of Cooperation

[District Name] Independent School District
[NAME OF SCHOOL]
[NAME, POSITION]

[DATE], 2018

Dear Kimberly Whaley,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Instructional Reading Practices for Third Grade African American Males* within the [DISTRICT NAME] Independent School District at [SCHOOL NAME] Elementary School Campus. I understand the researcher will request an interview session with the administrator. She will also ask for a list of all third grade reading teachers on the campus. Two teachers will each participate in a classroom observation of a reading lesson as well as an individual interview including a personal reflection survey. During the interviews and observations, focus will remain on instructional reading practices for third grade African American males. Once a timeline is solidified and confirmed by the campus administrator, data collection will proceed with completion of the face-to-face semistructured interview with the campus administrator, classroom observations, and face-to-face semistructured interviews and personal reflections with the third grade classroom reading teachers. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: Allowing the researcher to interview the campus administrator, observe in two third grade reading classrooms during a reading lesson, and interview the two observed third grade reading teachers. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in Proquest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

[DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE NAME]
[POSITION, ORGANIZATION/CAMPUS]
[STREET ADDRESS]
[CITY, STATE ZIP CODE]
[PHONE NUMBER]

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).